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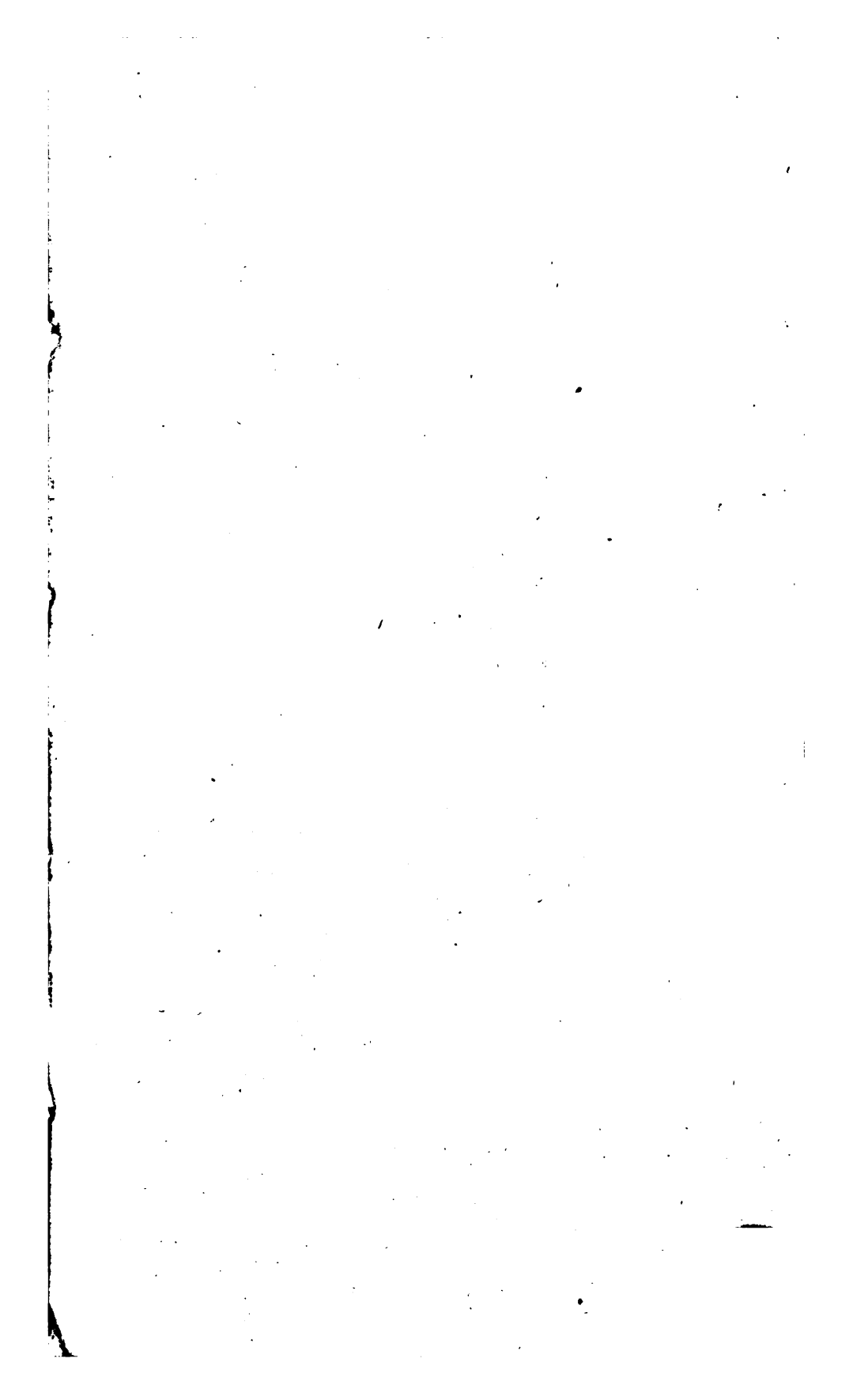
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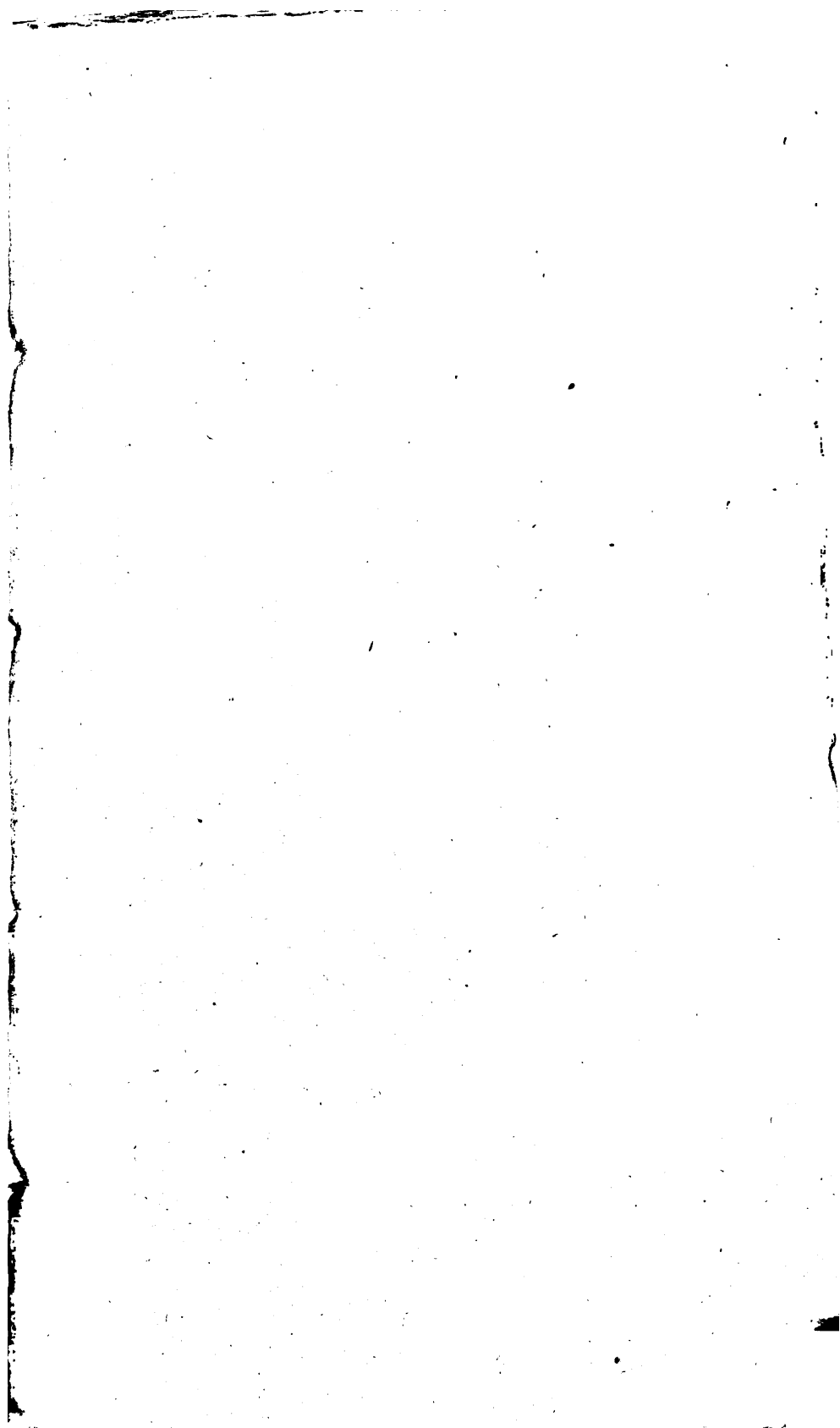
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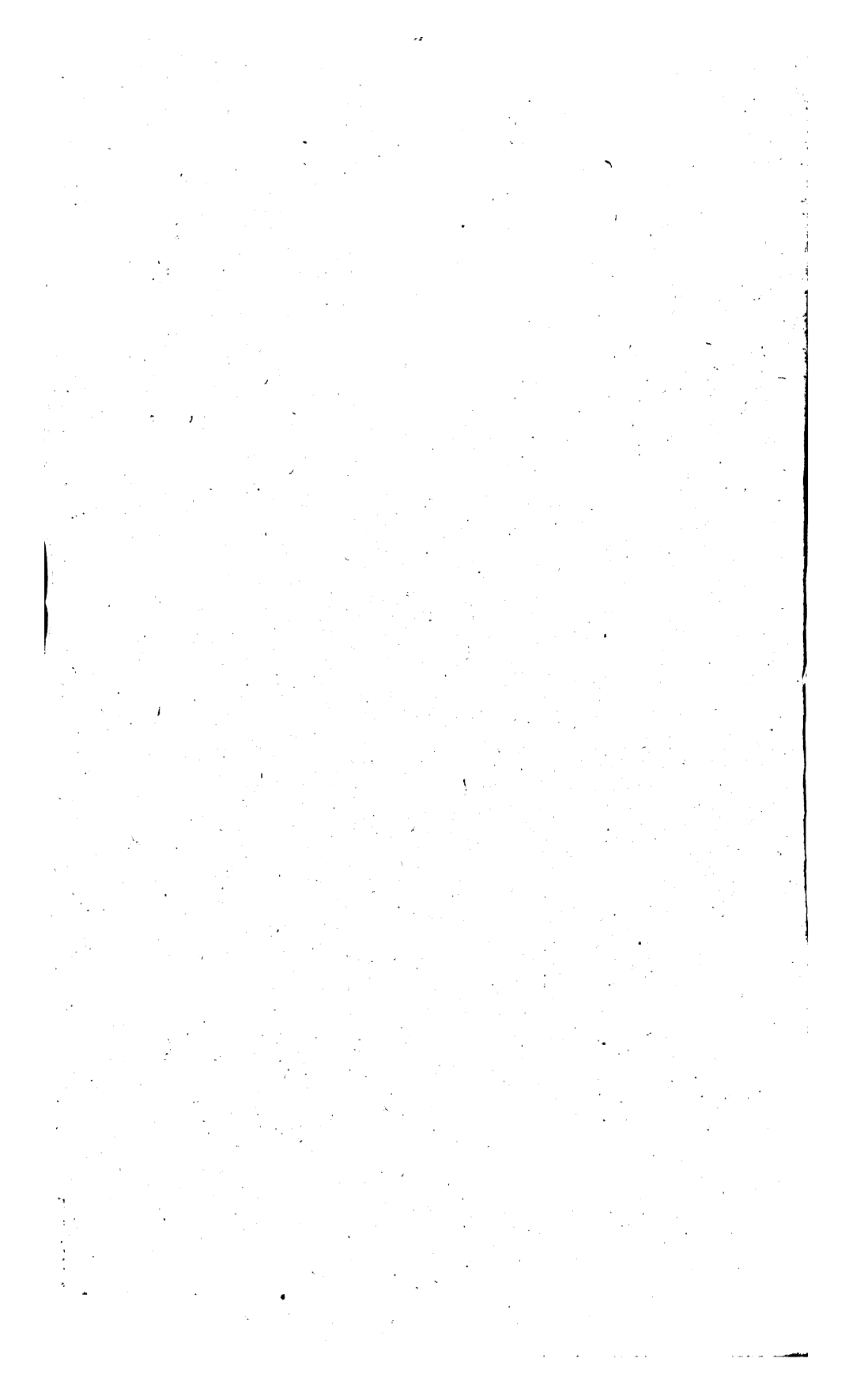
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S. H. 1825.

A N E S S A Y
ON THE
ABSOLVING POWER OF THE CHURCH.

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A N E S S A Y

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ABSOLVING POWER OF THE CHURCH.

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AN ÉSSAY

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WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO

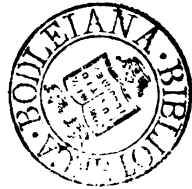
THE OFFICES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

FOR THE

ORDERING OF PRIESTS

AND THE

VISITATION OF THE SICK.



WITH COPIOUS ILLUSTRATIONS AND NOTES.

BY THE REV. T. H. LOWE, M. A.

VICAR OF GRIMLEY IN THE COUNTY OF WORCESTER,
AND CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE VISCOUNT GAGE.

“ Let us endeavour to find out what was the meaning of the words at the
“ time they were spoken, not what they may now imply.” DEAN TUCKER.

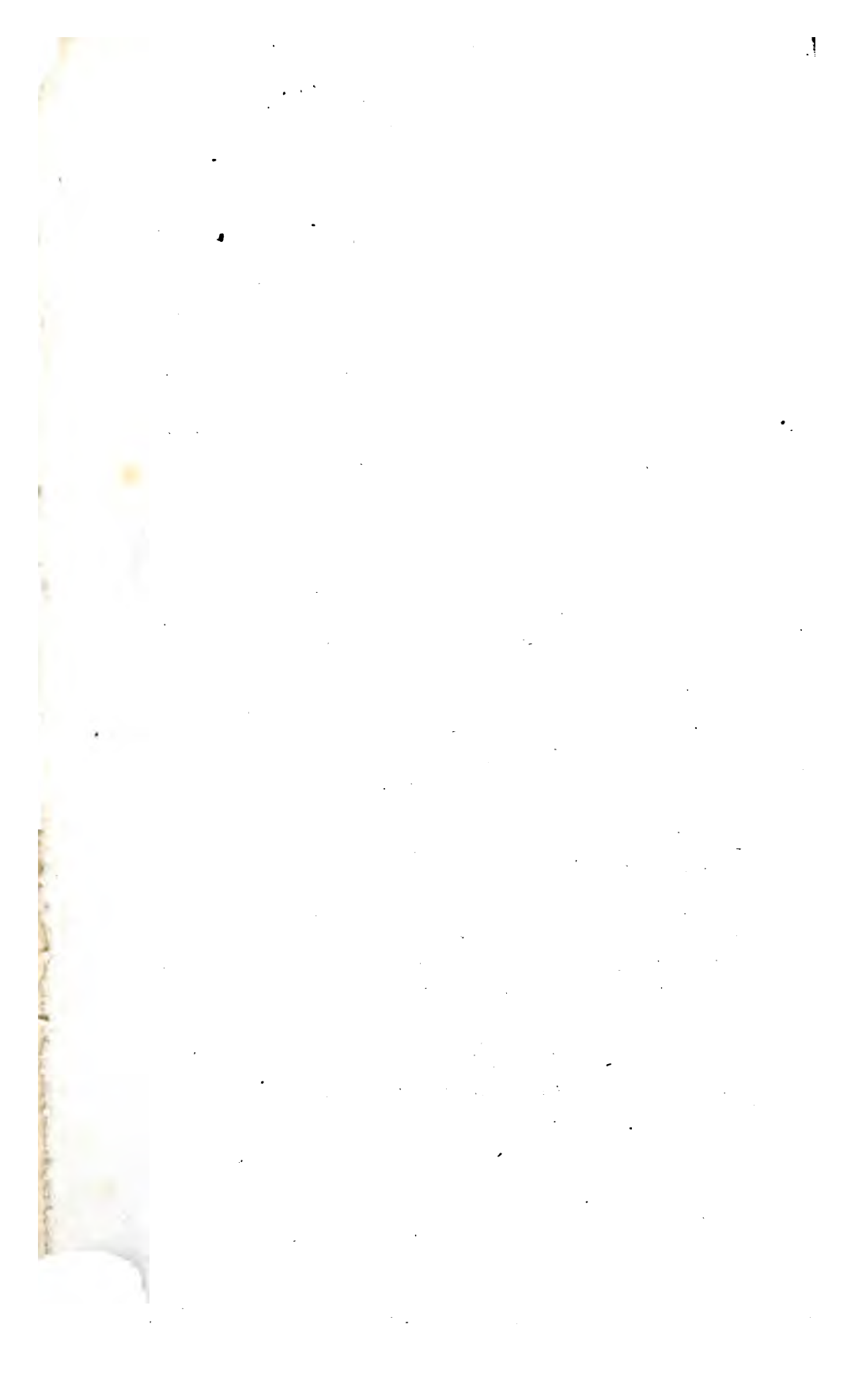
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TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
FOLLIOT H. W. CORNEWALL, D. D.
LORD BISHOP OF WORCESTER,
THE
FOLLOWING ESSAY
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,
AS
A SMALL TOKEN
OF THE AUTHOR'S GRATITUDE
FOR MANY FAVOURS.



THE following Essay comprises, with some additional matter, and a large appendage of notes, the substance of a discourse preached June 30th, 1824, in the cathedral church of Worcester, at the triennial visitation of the Lord Bishop of the diocese; and is now published at his Lordship's suggestion. Though many treatises have been written on the same subject, the difficulties with which it is attended have, generally, been rather evaded than answered. In the following pages these difficulties have been fairly stated; whether they have been fairly mastered is a point for others to decide. The younger student in theology, for whose use this little tract is principally designed, will, however, find some valuable matter collected in the notes, with the most scrupulous fidelity, from works of higher price,

or more difficult attainment; and, whatever may be the merits, or demerits, of the Essay itself, will, here at least, be directed to sources of better information.

CORFTON, *Dec.* 24, 1824.

AN ESSAY, &c.

THE Church of England confers ordination on her priests in the very words with which our Lord consecrated his apostles; and, in her Office for the Visitation of the Sick, she authorizes her priests, so ordained, to give the penitent, after confession made, a full and authoritative absolution from his sins. Both these points have given great offence. It appears intolerable presumption for the ministers of the church in the present day to claim, in this respect, equality with the apostles; and to arrogate to themselves a power peculiar to the godhead is nothing less than blasphemy.

I. Now it was often alleged by the fathers of the church, as a triumphant argument of the proper divinity of our blessed Lord, that he assumed to himself an absolute authority to pardon the sins of men. A very full selection of passages from the writings of the fathers, from Irenæus to Bede, who have used this argument, may be found in Archbishop Usher's Answer to the Jesuit's Challenge, pp. 79—85. ed. 1686; and in

the Origines Ecclesiasticæ of the accurate and learned Bingham, who judiciously remarks, that "the argument could have proved nothing, (1) "had men been equal sharers in this power with "him." B. xix. c. 1. For sin being the transgression of the divine law, God alone can have in himself the right to pardon it: and as without repentance sin cannot be pardoned, a permanent judicial authority to pronounce its full and final absolution cannot be possessed by any being who is not (2) able infallibly to scrutinize the inmost recesses of the human heart. Consequently, they who speak most largely of the Church's absolving power, unless they will assert, that they to whom this authority is given have a concurrent power of discerning the sincerity of men's repentance, must either acknowledge, that (3) all human absolution is conditional; or else affirm, that the all-seeing God will forgive sin without repentance, whensoever a Christian minister shall, either in charity or ignorance, pronounce its pardon.

But if the power of remitting absolutely the future penalties of sin neither is, nor can be, given to ignorant and sinful men, in what sense are we to understand these words of our Lord to his apostles: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose-soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto "them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are "retained?" The inquiry is one of great importance; for as the same words are used in the ordination of our priests; and as it cannot be

supposed, that those venerable and pious men by whom our Liturgy was reformed designed to mislead by an equivocal sense, when they retained in this form of ordination, without any restriction or qualification of their meaning, the identical words which our Lord employed in the consecration of his apostles; the necessary inference is, that they meant them to be taken strictly in the same sense; and designed to claim for the ministers of our Church (4) the same gift of the Holy Spirit, the same divine authority to absolve and to bind.

To know whether this claim is consistent with truth and piety, we must not take it for granted that the figurative phrase "to bind and to loose," or "to remit and to retain sins," (5) is to be interpreted literally, and according to the idioms of European languages; but should rather inquire in what sense our Lord himself employed, and the apostles understood it.

The primo-primitive apostolic Christian church, in its laws, in its public service, and in the ordination of its ministers, appears to have been formed on the exact model of the Jewish synagogue. This point, of great importance to our present inquiry, will require to be more fully examined; for it has been maintained by certain authors, with surprising confidence, that the orders of the Christian ministry were copied from those of the Aaronical priesthood; and that the respective offices and functions of our bishops, priests, and deacons, were framed in exact confor-

mity to the corresponding appointments of the high priest, priests, and Levites, in the temple service. The arguments in support of this groundless notion amount simply to this; that there were three different gradations and orders established among the ministers of the Jewish temple; and that there are three similar degrees of subordination in the Christian ministry. In this way it might be easy to demonstrate, that our civil constitution of king, lords, and commons, is copied from the high priest, priests, and Levites of the Jews. Nothing indeed can be more groundless than this strange hypothesis. Must we not, if it were well-founded, have met with, at least, some trace of it in the numerous epistles of St. Paul; who so often describes the various offices of the Christian ministry, and insists so forcibly on the right they have to a competent support from those over whom they preside, and for whose benefit they are appointed? Is it credible, that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which contains so perfect an exposition of the ministry and appointments of the temple, such a topic should have been wholly omitted, if the apostle had known, that the presbyters and pastors of the Christian church succeeded to the rights and privileges of the Aaronical priesthood? On such a subject, on which the Scriptures have maintained a fatal silence, it is in vain to look for an independent proof in the writings of the fathers. Their sentiments, however clearly expressed, in such a case can only shew what was the preva-

lent opinion at the period in which they wrote. One of the strongest of these passages, when separated from its context, is contained in the well-known epistle of Jerom to Evagrius: "Et ut sciamus traditiones apostolicas sumptas de Veteri Testamento, quod Aaron et filii ejus, atque Levitæ in templo fuerunt, hoc sibi episcopi et presbyteri, et diaconi vendicent in ecclesia:" yet this, promising as it appears, makes nothing for the purpose; for it was the great object of Jerom, in this epistle, to check the insolence of one who had presumed to exalt the office of deacons above that of the presbyters; "audio quendam in tantam erupisse vecordiam ut diaconos presbyteris, id est episcopis, anteferebat;" and he takes great pains to prove that the office of a bishop and a presbyter was originally the same. Consequently, to be consistent with himself, he can only mean, in the passage above cited, that as Aaron and his sons were superior to the Levites under the Law, so bishops and presbyters are superior to deacons in the gospel ministry. To lay too great a stress on this testimony of Jerom's may therefore not be prudent; and to wrest his words from their proper meaning cannot be fair.

The Christian church, whilst it continued under the government of the apostles, borrowed nothing from the Jewish temple, of which the rites and ceremonies, the sacrifices and oblations, the ministrations and the ministers were virtually abolished by the death of Christ, and were then in

fact, both priests and temple, on the very point of being swept away; as the apostle to the Hebrews [viii. 13.] not obscurely intimates, τὸ παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῦ. Accordingly, those rites of baptism and the holy eucharist, which our Lord himself directed to be perpetually observed in his church, were borrowed not from any positive institutions of the Mosaic law, but from certain customs which had been established in the Jewish church on the authority of their elders, and by a confederate discipline amongst themselves; and thus too the ordination of the apostles, with that one striking and necessary exception of our Lord's imparting spiritual power by direct afflation, was conformed to the existing practice of the synagogue. (6) The opinions of Grotius on this subject are well known; and Selden, in his learned treatise "De Synedrion," has fully proved, that during the apostolic age the Jewish Christians adhered to all the customs of their fathers. This truth will be acknowledged by all who have carefully studied the Acts and apostolical Epistles. That "salvation is of the Jews," was, in fact, a principle to which they so tenaciously adhered, that even the apostles themselves, though they received a commission to admit all nations into the church by baptism, and to instruct all mankind in the doctrines and duties of Christianity, did not, for the space of seven years at least from our Lord's ascension, baptize a single convert, unless he were previously of the Jewish religion; and it required

a farther and an especial revelation to teach St. Peter that it was lawful for him to baptize the uncircumcised Cornelius, or even so much as to enter into his house. "Ye know," said he, "how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or to come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." [Acts x. 28.] That men who were so obstinately attached to all the prejudices and customs of their country, even where the observance of them was not compatible with an enlightened knowledge of the comprehensive scheme of the Christian dispensation; a knowledge, be it observed, which was not imparted to the apostles at once by the plenary inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but was conveyed gradually to their minds, as the exigencies of the growing church required that they should possess it, and, perhaps, was chiefly communicated to them indirectly through the ampler revelations that were given to St. Paul; that men who were so zealously attached even to those institutions of their fathers which were at variance with the catholic spirit of the gospel, should not have framed their religious societies on the unexceptionable model of the synagogue, is in itself a thing so totally incredible, that it would require the strongest possible evidence to prove it. The evidence, however, lies wholly on the other side, as the following observations will shew.

1. St. James, the apostle, and first bishop of Jerusalem, writing to the Jewish Christians of

the dispersion, calls their religious assemblies by the name of synagogue; Ἐὰν γὰρ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν ὑμῶν ἀνὴρ χρυσοδακτύλιος, [James ii. 2.] In the speech of the same apostle, in the great synod which was held at Jerusalem, A. D. 51, (so long was the point unsettled,) to determine the question concerning the necessity of circumcision to salvation, it is evident from the context, that where he says, "Moses hath in every city" "them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day," by the word *synagogues* he means *Christian churches*, or assemblies: for he gives this as a reason why the *Gentile* Christians, who certainly would not have been allowed to enter a *Jewish* synagogue, should perceive the necessity of abstaining "from pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood." [Acts xv. 20, 21.]

2. In promulgating the gospel, we find, that the apostles invariably addressed themselves, in the first instance, to the members of the Jewish synagogue, in every city where they found one established; that the ruling presbyters permitted them without any scruple freely to exhort, and preach, and expound the scriptures to the people; and that on such occasions they asserted their claim to the rank of presbyters and doctors in the synagogue. [Vid. Act. xiii. 14. et alibi passim. On the word ἐκάθιστε, Luke iv. 20. Grotius remarks, "Munus doctoris suo sibi jure vindicans." Comp. Matt. xxvi. 55. "I sat daily with you *teaching* in the temple."] By these means,

of the earlier Christian converts by far the greater part were gathered out of the religious assemblies of the Jews; and in many places, it is not improbable, that entire synagogues at once were brought to acknowledge their Messiah in the crucified Jesus.

3. There is no circumstance by which men are more strongly marked, and separated from each other, than by the pointed difference of their religious rites and ceremonies, which strikes the senses, and is far more obvious to ordinary observers than any discrepancies in their modes of faith. Now the peculiar observances of the synagogue formed the most prominent feature by which the Jews at Rome, and in other great cities remote from Jerusalem, were distinguished from the professors of all other religions: but it is certain, that, in respect to these observances, there was no discernible difference between the unbelieving Jews and their Christian brethren. For in that edict of Claudius, the purport of which is given by Suetonius, [Claud. 25.] “*Ju-
dæos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes
Roma expulit;*” it is certain, that Christians were included under the general name of Jews. In the same manner, when St. Paul was brought by the unbelieving Jews before Gallio, the proconsul of Asia, that magistrate considered the points in dispute between them as merely relating to words and names, and flatly refused to hear the matter: [Acts xviii. 12—16. Comp. Acts xxv. 19, 20.] for though the name of Christians

had very early been appropriated at Antioch to those who acknowledged Jesus as the Christ; by men of other religions the professors of this faith were regarded merely as a Jewish sect, like the Pharisees, or Sadducees, or Essenes; and it was not till the other Jews, who every where pursued the followers of Jesus with the foulest calumnies, had, by the tumults which they excited, and the gross imputations which they cast on them, awakened the suspicions of the civil magistrate, that the Christians began to be considered as men professing a peculiar religion, hateful in itself, and hostile to all other modes of worship. Hence, from the odium that was attached to the Christian name, except in that passage of the Acts, xi. 26. where the fact is recorded, that the disciples of Jesus were called Christians first at Antioch, the word *Christian* occurs but twice more in all the sacred writings; once in the reply of king Agrippa to St. Paul, [Acts xxvi. 28.] where it is used with no small mixture of contempt; and once more in the first Epistle of St. Peter, where it is mentioned as a name which subjected to persecution those by whom it was borne. [1 Pet. iv. 16.] Now the Epistles of St. Peter were written but a very short time prior to his martyrdom. The second Epistle contains, indeed, internal evidence of a distinct revelation then made to the apostle concerning his approaching death. [ch. i. 14.] Every one is familiar with the memorable passage in Tacitus, [Annal. xv. 44.] where he speaks expressly

of the Christians as the objects of Nero's persecution: but on comparing this passage with that of Suetonius above quoted, it appears, that, even to the time of those historians, the Christians were regarded merely as Jews, or Jewish converts—the most detested sect of that detested people. And this circumstance, by the way, satisfactorily accounts for the comparative silence of the Greek and Roman writers of that period concerning events so remarkable as the history of our blessed Lord, and the propagation of the Christian religion; a silence which has most unaccountably been thought to invalidate the positive unanswerable testimony which we possess on these momentous subjects. Christianity was not regarded by them as a *new* religion, but merely as a branch of the Jewish, and, on that very account, beneath their notice.

4. Till the reign of Hadrian the first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem were all, without exception, of the circumcision, and adhered, we may be sure, in all other respects to the customs of their country, and to the law of Moses. But when that emperor, on the occasion of the insurrection of Bar-cochebas, destroyed the very ruins of Jerusalem, built a new city on its foundations, and utterly debarred the Jews from all access to the holy land, the primitive forms of ecclesiastical discipline and order underwent a considerable change. The officers of the church, though they retained their former titles, were henceforth respectively invested with very different powers;

the presbyters lost much of their authority, whilst that of the bishops was proportionably augmented; the assemblies of Christians no longer presented an exact counterpart of the Jewish synagogue—for it became the interest of the Christians to mark as strongly as possible the difference between themselves and that turbulent and rebellious people;—and the ceremonial observances of the Mosaic law were altogether banished from the church of Christ, or observed only by the inconsiderable remnant of Jewish Christians, who, under the names of Nazarenes and Ebionites, still adhered to the institutions of their fathers.

To understand the extent of those *ordinary* powers that were originally conferred on the apostles, we must therefore recur to the practice of the synagogue. Now the ordination of the Jewish presbyters was performed with solemn imposition of hands; to denote that the person so ordained was, in a peculiar manner, dedicated to God's service; and to invoke the divine blessing on him: and on those who were lawfully ordained, it was believed that the Holy Spirit rested. In these ordinations, which were slightly varied according to the different offices to which they were applied, and the different powers which they were intended to convey, (7) authority was usually given to bind and to loose, to remit and to retain; that is, either as interpreters of the law, or as rulers of the synagogue, to declare what was lawful and what was unlawful; as

guides and teachers of the people, to rebuke, to exhort, and to instruct; or as presidents and judges in spiritual matters, if need were, to (8) pass sentence on offenders. That this is the right interpretation of the phrase, which is very comprehensive, and (9) embraces almost the entire circle both of Hebrew theology and jurisprudence, might be shewn, were it needful, by many examples^a. In some passages of scripture these masters in Israel are recognised as the authorized interpreters of the law and the prophets^b; in others their power and practice, in the judicial sense of binding and loosing, are no less clearly asserted; and from these, compared with the corresponding passages which relate personally to the apostles, we may best discover the nature and extent of those analogous ordinary powers which were committed to them and to their successors, both as guides and as rulers of the Christian church. In the 18th chapter of St. Matthew there is a remarkable passage, which, through the advantage that has been taken of the equivocal word, ἐκκλησία, has been alleged by divines of almost every communion to demonstrate the necessity of a visible church (10) to decide controversies of faith. But though such a power is inherent in every church, it can never be proved to be so from this passage, which relates wholly to private offences, and to the power of the syna-

^a John iii. 10. Matt. xxiii. 2, &c.

^b John ix. 22. xii. 42. xvi. 2. Matt. x. 17. Mark xiii. 9. Luke xxi. 12, &c.

gogue, or ecclesiastical sanhedrin, in the last resort. For our Lord is here prescribing certain rules, in particular cases, for the present direction of his followers. His first rule is, that if any one should treat them injuriously, they should use every charitable endeavour to bring him to a better mind, and have recourse, in the first instance, to private expostulation; if that were unavailing, that they should next remonstrate with him before one or two selected witnesses; and if he still persisted in his injury, that they should bring the matter before the assembled synagogue: but if all these endeavours should fail to reclaim him, "then," said our Lord, (11) "let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican;" let the presbyters pronounce sentence, and expel him from their communion: to which he immediately subjoins the very striking declaration, "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." The terms in which this solemn sanction is given by our Lord to the deliberate sentence of the Jewish synagogue, are, it will be observed, the very same, even to the letter, as he used to St. Peter, when he conferred on him the power of the keys; and the same also, in substance, as he addressed to all the apostles, when he ordained them presbyters and rulers of the Christian church.

Again; in the ninth chapter of St. John's Gospel it is related, that when the man, blind from

his birth, whom our Lord had healed on the sabbath day, persisted in acknowledging the divine character and mission of the blessed Jesus, the presbyters, before whom he was arraigned, first judicially pronounced that his sins were bound upon him, and then excommunicated him: "Thou art yet," said they, "in thy sins—and they cast him out."

Hence it appears, that, in our Saviour's time, the authority to bind and to loose, which the Jewish presbyters received at their ordination, gave them a general power of acting both as teachers and rulers of the people: and it must, I think, be admitted, that our Lord, in using the same form, designed to convey to his apostles the same general authority in spiritual things, and the same power of discipline for the perpetual edification and government of the Christian church, as the Jewish presbyters at that time possessed in the sanhedrin and synagogue. And with respect to these, as it never was pretended either by them or for them, that, by their faculty of binding and loosing, they were enabled to absolve men from the future penalties of sin, there was no danger that the apostles should imagine, (whatever others may since have imagined for them,) that, by their similar ordination, they were invested with such an unheard-of power: for of the presbyters of the synagogue, who received authority to bind and to loose, no less than of themselves, to whom the same commission was given, they had heard our Lord expressly

declare, that their sentence, pronounced on earth, should be ratified in heaven. Until, therefore, unanswerable proof be brought from scripture, that the apostles either claimed or exercised such an absolving power, we may confidently repeat our assertion, that the authority to remit the future penalties of sin was never granted by God to man.

But that we may fully understand the nature and extent of those ordinary powers which the apostles received and transmitted to their successors in the ministry, it may be useful to examine the subject more in detail.

As the reward of St. Peter's enlightened faith and prompt confession, our Lord vouchsafed to honour him with two signal promises: first, that on him, as on a rock, he would build his church; secondly, that he would give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven; with an assurance, that whatsoever he should bind on earth should be bound in heaven, and whatsoever he should loose on earth, should be loosed in heaven. The first of these promises was (12) personal, and peculiar to St. Peter; and was accomplished when that prince of the apostles was divinely chosen to lay the first foundation of the church at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost; and was afterwards selected, by especial revelation, to lay the first foundation of the Gentile church in the person of Cornelius. The second promise, which he had in common with the other apostles, was fulfilled in the two commissions which our Lord gave

them (13) at different times after his resurrection. These commissions, distinct in their design and scope, are by no means to be confounded: a point the more necessary to be observed, because a similar distinction is maintained in the ordination of our priests. By their first commission to remit and to retain sins, the apostles were invested with general powers to preside over the Christian church; by the second, the whole extent of their commission as "ambassadors for Christ," was unfolded: they were especially directed to preach and to baptize, to declare the whole scheme of the Christian dispensation, and to announce to all mankind, in the Redeemer's name, the remission of their sins upon repentance. In one only respect their ordination was distinguished from all that either preceded or followed it. For that spiritual gift, which the Jewish presbyters received at their ordination, was transmitted in continued succession from the great sanhedrin^c, on whom the Holy Spirit at first descended, under Moses, in the wilderness; and none were held to be rightly ordained, except they received their order through this unbroken line of succession. But our Lord conveyed the same spiritual gift to his apostles by an act of sovereign, divine authority; assuring them, that with the same fulness of power with which the Father had sent him, he sent them forth to the

^c Numbers xi. 25.

work of their ministry: and by the significant action of breathing on them, when he bade them receive the Holy Ghost, he gave them a sensible token, that their authority to act as rulers and teachers of the church proceeded directly from himself. Thus, as Hooker justly observes, "the Holy Ghost, which our Saviour in his first ordinations gave, doth no less concur with spiritual vocations throughout all ages, than the Spirit which God derived from Moses to them that assisted him in his government, did descend from them to their successors in the like authority and place." *Ecclesiastical Polity*, book v. sect. 77.

This mode of imparting spiritual authority could not, it is evident, be imitated without impiety. The apostles therefore, in this as in other respects, observed the practice of the synagogue, and ordained their fellow-labourers and successors in the ministry by imposition of hands. To this form of apostolical ordination (14) the catholic church has invariably adhered. Thus, in the Church of England, the general powers which belong to the sacerdotal order, are first given with imposition of hands, and in the words of our Saviour, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the church of God—whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained:" and then—as it forms so important a branch of the ministerial office—a distinct au-

thority is subsequently given "to preach the word of God, and to administer the holy sacraments."

II. But if we openly renounce, as pernicious and unscriptural, the claim to a plenary absolving power, there remains to be discussed a second question of no little difficulty. On what grounds, it may be asked, did our reformers retain, in the private office for the visitation of the sick, the full and authoritative absolution of the church of Rome? "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences: and by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." These words, obvious as their sense appears, undoubtedly admit of two interpretations. But the question with which we are at present concerned, is not, in what sense they may possibly be understood *now*; but in what sense they actually were understood by the generality of Christians at the period of the Reformation. To discover the reasons which probably induced the fathers of our reformed church to admit into this private office a form of absolution so apparently irreconcilable with the truth, we must therefore take into consideration the inveterate opinions on the subject of priestly absolution, which, at that era, were universally maintained: and then, if I mistake not, we shall be able not merely to vindicate

their conduct in this behalf, but to shew, that they were guided by the purest spirit of enlightened Christian charity.

Whilst the church continued under the government of the apostles, its public censures, which seem to have been inflicted only in cases of the highest necessity, (15) were charitably revoked as soon as the offender exhibited tokens of a sincere repentance. But, instead of this prudent lenity, a discipline so severe and intolerable was subsequently introduced, that it defeated the very purpose for which it was instituted. For when the Christian religion acquired the protection of the Roman emperors, persons of all ranks and characters, not from sincere conviction, but from mere secular motives, hastened to enrol themselves under the banners of the cross. The ensuing corruption of manners brought a scandal on the Christian name, which the rulers of the church endeavoured to repress by the infliction of the most rigorous public penances. But it soon appeared that a discipline, which might perhaps have been enforced when the members of the church were comparatively few, and those united by the bands of mutual charity, had now lost its efficacy. Some were too powerful to dread; others were too heedless to regard it; and none were willing to submit themselves to such public humiliation. (16) Private penitentiaries were, therefore, established in the eastern church; but these also, being found liable to great abuse, were in no long time abolished, and

every man was left to confess privately his private sins to God. In the western church the matter had a very different issue. For, about the commencement of (17) the thirteenth century, the indicative form of absolution, " I absolve thee," which till then had never been heard of in the catholic church, was introduced into the private confessionals: and it met with so favourable a reception from the priesthood, whom it exalted in the eyes of the superstitious multitude to a sort of participation with the godhead, that the precatory and declaratory forms were wholly laid aside; and it was openly maintained, that as Christ had instituted baptism to give spiritual life, and the eucharist to nourish it, so penance was a sacrament to restore life to the soul, and (18) absolution the very form and essence of it.

At the era of the Reformation these opinions were so inveterately rooted in the minds of men, that baptism itself was considered not more indispensable to procure their admission into the church of Christ, than priestly absolution to ensure their pardon at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment. To eradicate this mischievous persuasion, our reformers appear to have done all that the soundest wisdom and most enlightened Christian piety could dictate. In the public offices and liturgy they retained none but the declaratory or precatory forms of absolution; and in (19) the elaborate Apologies of Jewell and Hooker it was unequivocally asserted, that the ministerial sentence of absolution, except when

it relates to the removal of ecclesiastical censures, is no more than a declaration of what God has done. But, whilst they made use of every prudent caution to remove the grounds of the opposite error, they knew that the great mass of the people could not at once be thoroughly divested of their ancient prejudices; and that, especially in the hour of sickness, when bodily weakness was superadded to mental infirmity, they would be apt to languish for those consolations which both they and their fathers had hitherto thought necessary to their quiet passage out of this mortal life. In compassion to these human weaknesses and natural misgivings, they retained, for the comfort of the dying penitent, (20) a full and authoritative form of sacerdotal absolution, in the private office for the visitation of the sick: as the blessed apostles, in condescension to the similar prejudices of their own countrymen, permitted the churches of Judea to retain the ceremonial observances of the Mosaic law. If the cases are not exactly parallel, they so nearly correspond, that few will venture to deny to our reformers, in this instance, the praise of that exalted charity, and that considerate attention to the pardonable frailties of human nature, which are of more value in the sight of God than the highest attainments in mere knowledge or in mere faith.

It was designed, I conceive, from the first, that among the members of our own communion this indicative absolution, which was retained to

meet a present exigency, should gradually fall into total disuse; for the minister is not authorized to give absolution (21) in this form, except at the earnest entreaty of the penitent himself. But at a period when the presbyters of our church must, in a vast majority of instances, have been required to administer the last consolations of religion to men but imperfectly converted from the errors of the church of Rome, who might passionately desire that fuller absolution which custom had made sacred, and superstition necessary; had they either, in the pride of superior knowledge, withheld it, or coldly stayed to dispute the point with the dying penitent, they would have lamentably discovered, that they little knew "what manner of spirit they were of." "There is nothing," says the venerable Hooker, "which the soul of man doth desire in that last hour so much as comfort against the natural terrors of death, and other scruples of conscience, which commonly do then most trouble and perplex the weak; towards whom the very law of God doth exact at our hands all the helps that Christian lenity and indulgence can afford."

III. Two things have, I trust, been proved: first, that by their divine commission to bind and to loose, to remit and to retain sins, the apostles were invested only with general powers as teachers and rulers of the church; and, consequently, that there is nothing either of presumption or impiety in now claiming the same divine autho-

ritty for those who receive their ordination to the same office in unbroken succession from them. Secondly, that the fathers of our reformed church, whilst they openly disclaimed the power of absolving men authoritatively from the future penalties of sin, acted wisely, and charitably, and in conformity with apostolical example, when, to meet a present exigency, they retained an indicative form of absolution in the private office for the visitation of the sick.

The provision which, at the same time, was made in the public liturgies to instruct the people in the true grounds of their pardon and acceptance with God, was attended with such success, that the opinion of an authoritative and judicial power of absolution, as inherent in the Christian priesthood, was well nigh eradicated. Yet, at the (22) subsequent revisals of the Book of Common Prayer, under the first James and the second Charles, though a declaratory sense was generally ascribed even to this indicative form, we may lament that it was thought unnecessary to make any farther alteration in it. For, though the (23) sense in which our church now interprets this absolution be unquestionable, it is obvious to remark, that, where a declaratory sense is confessedly intended, it would be far better, for the sake of avoiding all possible mistake, to make use of a declaratory form. The present formulary, "I absolve thee," is apt to remind persons of the extravagant pretensions of the church of Rome. That it is peculiarly open to

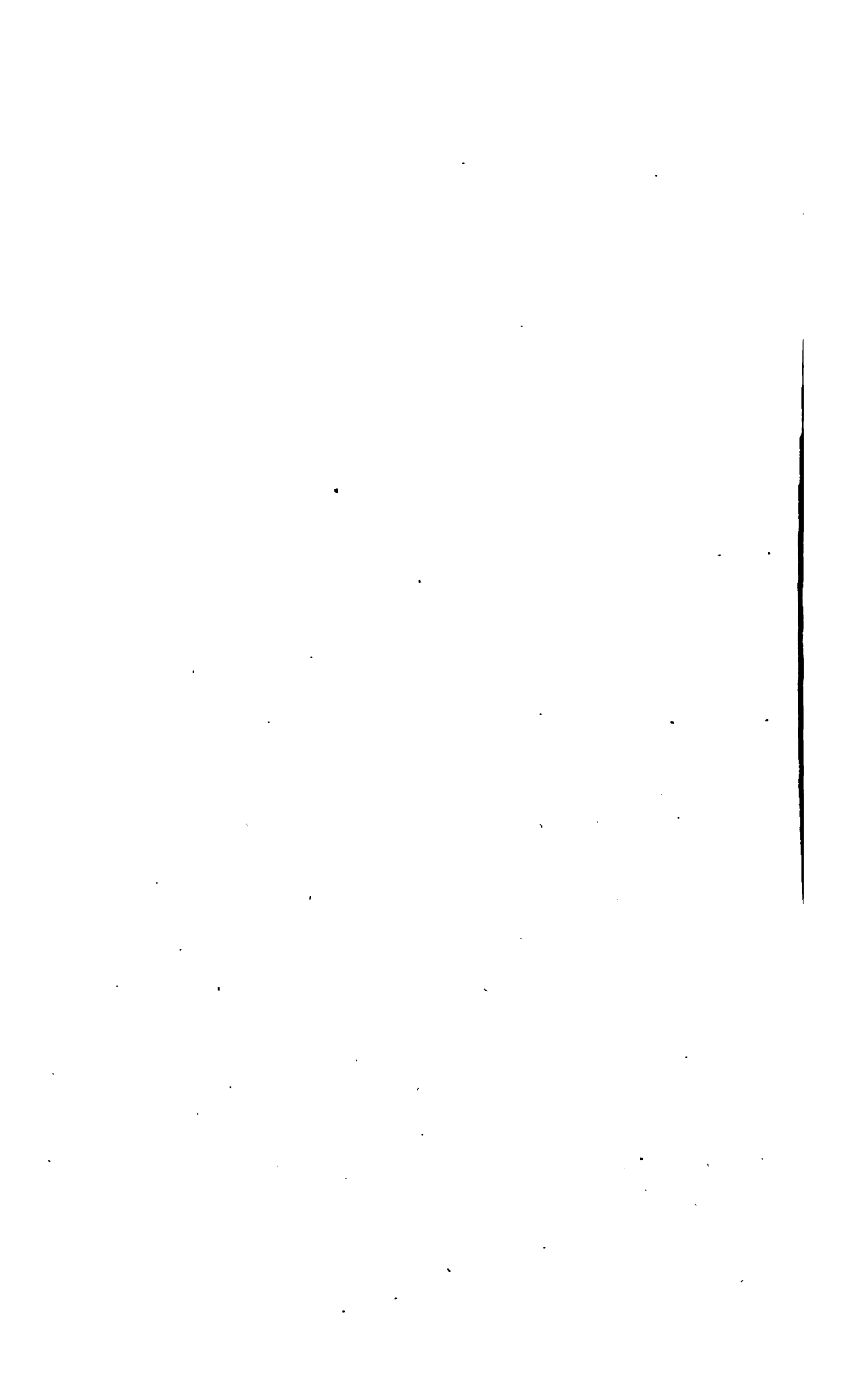
misconstruction is evident from the frequent explanations that have been given from time to time of its received conventional meaning in our church. But as the office in which it occurs is intended for the use even of the most unlearned, who can rarely penetrate beyond the literal and obvious meaning of words, and cannot be expected to read these learned expositions; and as men (24) the most distinguished for piety and learning have seriously scrupled to use it, we may perhaps be permitted to regret that it was retained when the exigency of the case no longer made it necessary; and to express a hope that it may still be removed, or altered, whenever a fit opportunity for doing so shall present itself to those in authority.

But if, in this matter, our church assumes no higher power for her ministers than that of declaring, as "ambassadors for Christ," the pardon of the repentant sinner, it may be said, (25) as it has been strangely said, that such a claim amounts, in fact, to nothing; that any other man, as well as a minister, or even an apostle, may do as much as this, and with equal effect. By no means. If it were so, our Lord himself, with reverence be it spoken, did ill to consecrate and send forth a peculiar order of men to proclaim repentance and remission of sins in his name among all nations. "To preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," is the great business on

which those are sent, who have "received the " Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest " in the church of God." The catholic church, in fulfilment of this sacred duty, has, therefore, from the earliest ages enjoined her ministers, by a formal act of absolution, to give the repentant sinner assurance of his pardon. Bold, proud men may despise this gracious ordinance: but the better part of Christians are so far from entertaining a confident surmise of their own sufficiency, that, especially on their death-bed, they are rather apt to be filled with doubts and misgivings; to feel that their sins are too great and too many to be pardoned, and their repentance too weak, and their faith too imperfect to avail them. In merciful commiseration (26) of these natural inquietudes, the consecrated ministers of Christ on earth are especially required to pronounce absolution in his name, and to give peace and assurance to the penitent at his latter end.

To give full effect, however, to this and the other ministrations of the church, they, for whose sake the clergy are set apart to God's service, must esteem them to be, what they really are, " ambassadors for Christ to men:" and they also to whom " this ministry of reconciliation" is committed, must deeply bear in mind on what errand they are sent, and whose servants they are. Thus acting under a serious and habitual conviction of the greatness of the charge that is laid upon them, and of their awful responsibility, they will best " fulfil the ministry which they have

“received of the Lord,” and be able, at the last day, to “give a good account of their stewardship.” But whilst it is their endeavour to soothe and to sustain the broken-hearted; to confirm and animate the feeble and desponding; to dissipate the thick glooms of doubt and despair, which too often hang over the mind of the departing Christian; and in the name of Christ, and by his authority, to assure the penitent of pardon: let it also be their care so faithfully to instruct their people in the immutable truths of the Gospel, and so to set before them the real grounds of their pardon and acceptance with God, that, neither trusting to the imaginary inward assurance of an enthusiastic spirit, nor to the outward absolution of any erring mortal, they may not vainly hope to obtain remission of their sins through Christ’s atoning blood, unless its application to themselves shall be evidenced by the fruits of a renewed obedience, and their own conscience bear its unerring testimony to the sincerity of their repentance and their faith.



ILLUSTRATIONS AND NOTES.

ILLUSTRATIVE NOTES.

(1) PAGE 2. l. 3. *Had men been equal sharers.*] Thus Grotius on Mark ii. 7. "Deum esse qui condonet peccata passim testantur Psalmi, Prophetæ, ipse Moses. At potestatem hanc homini cuiquam communicatam nusquam legebatur. Dicitur quidem sacerdos in minoribus delictis *expiare hominem*; sed hoc *expiare* est ad remissionem præparare. . . . Annuntiavit Nathan Davidi ablatum ab eo crimen; at ipsa condonatio Dei uni tribuitur, in nullam ejus partem veniente propheta. Hinc colligebant actum hunc esse ἀποιώ-
ντην, *incommunicabilem*. Christus qui verbis iis erat usus quæ possent et aliter accipi, cum tamen ita ut res ipsa erat accipi videret, usus inimicorum in alia, aperte sibi vindicavit jus sibi, ut homini, a Deo Patre concessum, insigne edens miraculum directe in ejus juris testimonium. Imo et ante miraculum sanationis aliud edidit multo insignius, cum intimas adstantium cogitationes apertissime sibi cognitatas ostendit, quod sacræ literæ non minus proprium Dei statuunt quam peccata remittere."

(2) Page 2. l. 11. *Able infallibly to scrutinize.*] Many learned persons have taken it for granted, that the power of absolving men judicially from the future penalties of sin was undoubtedly conferred on the apostles in John xx. 22, 23.; and that no interpretation, which would limit the power of binding and loosing, or remitting and retaining sins, to any lower kind of absolution, is

capable of being maintained. The only ground on which this opinion can be defended with any show of reason, is the assumption, that, by special illumination of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were enabled to discover the hidden thoughts of men, and to discern the sincerity of their repentance. "Upon this miraculous gift of knowing the secrets of men's hearts," says archbishop Tillotson, [referring to 1 Cor. xii. 10.] "it seems to be very probable, that that which is commonly called the power of the keys did depend, I mean the power of remitting or retaining sins. For they, [the apostles,] who had the privilege of knowing men's hearts, might do this upon certain grounds, and were secured from mistake in the exercise of their power upon particular persons, which the priests and ministers of the church now are not, nor can be; because they cannot see into men's hearts, whether they be truly penitent and qualified for forgiveness, or not." [Serm. 230. vol. xi. p. 300.] In the same manner it is urged by the generality of modern writers on this subject, that the apostles, who by special illumination possessed the faculty of *discerning spirits*, were enabled to discover if the professions of faith and repentance were sincere or false; and by their infallible knowledge of what was passing in the thoughts of men, were preserved from all possibility of error, either in absolving or condemning.

That spiritual gift, however, which St. Paul calls *διακρίσεις πνευμάτων*, "the discerning of spirits," 1 Cor. xii. 10. on which the whole proof is rested, that the apostles possessed an infallible knowledge of the human heart, relates to quite another matter; and, to whatever it may relate, was certainly not peculiar to the apostles. All the texts which have been alleged [as 1 Cor. xii. 10. xiv. 29. Acts v. 3. and viii. 21—23.] to prove that the apostles possessed in *ordinary* this unerring intuition, are either totally foreign to the purpose, or fall short of

establishing it, or make directly against it. As to the *extraordinary* gifts and powers with which the apostles were invested, they were given them solely as public credentials of their heavenly embassy, and as visible additional testimonials to the divinity of our Lord: but this absolving power, had they possessed it, must, from the nature of the thing, have been entirely secret in its effect and operation, and could not in the slightest degree have confirmed the authority of their mission, or have had the remotest tendency to establish the truth of the doctrines which they taught.

(3) Page 2. line 17. "*All human absolution is conditional.*" This is admitted by the most eminent writers of the church of Rome. "Nam qui dicit, Ego te baptizo, vel absolvo, *non affirmat se absolute baptizare vel absolvere*, cum non ignoret, multis modis fieri posse, ut neque baptizet, neque absolvat, licet ea verba pronuntiet; nimirum si is, qui sacramentum suscipere videtur, forte non habeat suscipiendi intentionem, vel non sit rite dispositus, vel obicem ponat. Igitur minister illis verbis nihil aliud significat, nisi se, quod in se est, sacramentum reconciliationis vel absolutionis impendere, quod vim habet *in homine disposito* peccata omnia dimittendi." Bellarmin. de Pœnit. lib. II. c. 14. sect. penult. Opp. T. III.

(4) Page 3. line 10. "*The same gift of the Holy Spirit.*" That gift of the Holy Spirit which our Lord conveyed to his apostles, when he gave them their commission to remit and to retain sins, was something perfectly distinct both from those extraordinary gifts which they did not receive till the day of Pentecost, and from those extraordinary influences which are exerted on the souls of all faithful Christians: it was, in short, neither more nor less than a divine authority to act as presbyters in his church. In this sense the phrase is used in our ordination service. "Receive the Holy Ghost *for*

"the office and work of a priest in the church of God," &c. and such a divine authority, it is devoutly to be hoped, there is neither blasphemy nor arrogance in our claiming, since without it all our ministrations would be a perfect nullity. "It was the custom of the Jews," as bishop Stillingfleet remarks, "to speak of all that were legally ordained among them *שרתה עליהו שכינה* and the divine presence, or schecinah, rested upon them, which sometimes they called *רוח הקודש* the Holy Spirit, supposed to be in a peculiar manner present after this solemn separation of them from others in the world, and dedication of themselves to God. Answerable to this may that of our Saviour be, when he gives his apostles authority to preach the gospel, he doth it in that form of words, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost*, and then gives them the power of binding and loosing, usually conveyed in Jewish ordinations, *Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose sins ye retain, they are retained.*" [Irenicum, part. 2. c. vi. sect. 14.] Again; "To the end that the apostles might have some evidence of the power thus conferred upon them, he breathes the Holy Ghost on them, and said, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost*; which we are not to understand of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were not received till the day of Pentecost, [Acts ii. 1.] but of the *authoritative power* of preaching the gospel, which was now conferred upon them by this solemn rite of breathing the Holy Ghost on the apostles. In which sense the church of England understands that expression in the ordination of her ministers, as it implies only an authority for the preaching of the gospel, which being conveyed by ordination, is fitly expressed by the same words which our Saviour used in *conferring the same power upon his apostles.*" [Id. sect. 1.]

In the preceding extracts it will be observed, that bi-

bishop Stillingfleet understands, as many others have done, that by their commission to remit and to retain sins the apostles merely received authority to preach the gospel; others again maintain, that it only enabled them to inflict or to remove ecclesiastical censures. The truth is, that by their ordination they were invested with general powers to act both as teachers and rulers in the Christian church. Except for the sake of greater accuracy and distinctness, the point is wholly immaterial; since, on either supposition, the same *ordinary* powers which were then conveyed to the apostles, are undoubtedly bestowed on their successors in the ministry.

(5) Page 3, line 16. "*Is to be interpreted literally.*"] They who conceive that these words, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained;" are, with reference to the apostles, to be understood in their literal and highest sense, as conferring a plenary authority to remit the future penalties of sin, are forced to assume, that the church of England, which openly disclaims for her ministers any such absolving power, in the ordination of her priests employs them in an improper and far inferior signification. But this explanation, or rather subterfuge, is open to very serious objections. For all plain and unprejudiced persons, when they observe the *same* form of words employed on a *similar* occasion, as our church unquestionably employs these words of our Lord in the ordination of her priests, without any qualification of their meaning, must inevitably conclude, that they are used precisely in the *same* sense; and may very justly remark, that if the church in her ordination office designed to use these words merely in a subdued and restricted sense, it will be hard to defend her from the charge of wilful equivocation, or at the least of culpable neglect, in not taking especial care (as the authors of

some of the Greek rituals have done) to place it beyond all controversy that such was the sense in which she intended to apply them.

Thus in attempting to defend the church from the double charge of presumption and blasphemy, she is left exposed to an attack not less serious from another quarter. This new difficulty, however, is occasioned solely by assuming the erroneous principle, that the words of ordination, as they were addressed to the apostles, are to be understood according to the full force of their literal signification. This very error, of interpreting literally expressions which are necessarily figurative, gave birth to the monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation; a doctrine of which I know not that it is either more absurd, or more pernicious in its consequences, than that of a plenary absolving power delegated to the Christian priesthood. But if our Lord, by the authority which he conferred on his apostles "to bind and loose, to remit "and to retain sins," invested them only with such general powers and faculties in the Christian church as were exercised by the presbyters and teachers of the Jewish synagogue, to whom also the Holy Spirit was given; the church is surely free from the dreaded imputation of presumption and impiety, in claiming for her ministers the same divine authority to absolve and to bind, as was imparted to the apostles themselves.

(6) Page 6. line 16. "*The opinions of Grotius and Sel-den.*"] "Totum regimen ecclesiarum Christi conformatum fuit ad synagogarum exemplar." [Grotius, in Act. xi. 30.] And again; "Omnia laudabilia synagogæ instituta retinere apostoli. Et si quis quæ Hebræi de ea re scripsere, cum moribus antiquæ ecclesiæ comparet, miram inveniet congruentiam." [Id. in 1 Cor. v. 2.] "Fuit apostolorum tempore, tum nominis, tum juris Judaici communio, inter Judæos reliquos atque eos qui Christi disciplinam amplexati essent. Ne-

“que enim eorum quisquam erat per annos aliquot ab
 “ascensu Domini, qui non aut origine atque undequa-
 “que Judæus, seu Ebræus ex Ebræis, aut e gentibus,
 “ut proselytus justitiæ, ita adscitus, ut inde pro Judæo
 “etiam omnino censeretur, adeoque pars undequaque
 “esset synagogæ, seu ecclesiæ universalis, primo Judai-
 “cæ, atque eo nomine Christianismum induens, ejusdem
 “nihilominus synagogæ, seu ecclesiæ juribus uteretur.
 “De Paulo ipso, Ebræo ex Ebræis, adeoque moribus
 “Ebræis accuratius instituto, res palam est. --- Ne-
 “que enim ob Christi disciplinam acceptam exue-
 “bant eorum quicumque Judæorum sive nomen, sive jus,
 “quod ante sic possidebant. Nec disciplina illa apud
 “eos alia quam Judaismus vere reformatus, seu cum
 “fide in Messiam, seu Christum, rite conjunctus. Unde
 “Judæi omnimodi, quantum ad hanc rem in πιστεύον-
 “τας, seu τῇ πίστει ὑπακούοντας, credentes, et μὴ πιστεύον-
 “τας, non credentes, tribui solebant; idque tam ante
 “Christiani nominis ortum, quam post; et tam creden-
 “tes ex eis quam non credentes Judæi, tum sic merito
 “dicti, [Act. xvi. 20. xxi. 20. Gal. ii. 15, &c.] utpote
 “originem, statum, ac jus Judaicum, ut ante, retinen-
 “tes.” [Selden de Syned. l. i. c. 8. Opp. tom. i. p. 896.]

(7) Page 12. line 28. “*Authority was usually given
 “to bind and to loose.*”] The notion of binding and loos-
 “ing is applicable to all those general powers which be-
 “longed to the presbyters of the synagogue, either in their
 “judicial capacity, or as teachers and interpreters of the
 “divine laws. “*Interdicere et prohibere*, (ut apud Ho-
 “merum,) atque etiam *legem ferre*, δῆν seu *ligare* signi-
 “ficat: ut in veteri inscriptione Isidi Nysæ in Arabia
 “olim dicata, quæ reperitur apud Diodorum Siculum.
 “Ὅσα ἐγὼ δῆσω οὐδαὶς δύναται λύσαι, *Quæcunque ego liga-*
 “*vero nemo poterit solvere*; ubi exemplaria aliquot ha-
 “bent pro δῆσω, *ligavero*, ἰνομολόγησα, *lege lata præce-*
 “*pero*. Ex adverso autem obligationibus respondent

“æque multiplices *solutiones* et *liberationes*, de quibus
 “etiam est notissimus in Pandectis titulus. --- Et *libe-*
 “*rationis* verbum eandem vim habet quam *solutionis*.
 “--- Nec alius earum forsân sensus Josepho, ubi de
 “amplissima Pharissæorum tempore Alexandræ principis
 “potestate loquens, Διοικηται τῶν ὅλων, inquit, ἐγίνοντο,
 “διώκειν τε καὶ καθέλειν οὕς ἐθέλοιεν, λύειν τε καὶ δεῖν, *Rebus*
 “*omnibus præerant ut administratores, summovendo ac*
 “*depellendo quos vellent, solvendo item et ligando.*”
 [Selden De Syned. Opp. vol. 1. p. 936.] He next pro-
 ceeds to shew, that the words *to bind* and *to loose* were
 not unfrequently applied by the Jews to the *solution*,
 as we still say, of cases of conscience; and then, by way
 of confuting those who would limit them exclusively to
 excommunication, he subjoins, “Si vero notione su-
 “mantur priori, quæ adeo ampla est, et ad omnimodum
 “sive res sive personas obligandi ac solvendi apud ho-
 “mines, id est, prohibendi, permittendi, imperandi, ad-
 “eoque pœnas irrogandi, remittendi, idque ex jure sive
 “divino sive humano, id est, universo, morem receptum,
 “juxta naturam sui, extenditur, permirum videbitur un-
 “denam sensus verborum, adeo latæ et diffusæ signifi-
 “cationis, eousque coangustaretur, ut tantillam solum-
 “modo sui partem retineret; quasi *oceanî* nomine gut-
 “tulam unam et alteram, aut *talenti* uncias pauculas,
 “aut *universi* aliquot tantum atomos denotari admitte-
 “remus.” P. 938.

(8) Page 13, line 3. “*To pass sentence on offenders.*”]
 The desire to curb the power and to curtail the privi-
 leges of the church, seems to have prevailed in Selden’s
 mind over all other considerations; otherwise it would
 be hardly credible, that in the same work from which
 the preceding extracts are taken, he should flatly deny,
 as he subsequently does, [l. ii. 7.] that any forensic
 power whatever is contained in the notion of binding
 and loosing. Setting all other authorities aside, it must,

I think, be allowed, were it only on the score of Matt. xviii. 19. that in the power of binding and loosing excommunication is included, with all other judicial acts which the presbyters of the synagogue, as such, might lawfully perform. A power of this kind is no less necessary to the conservation of the church, than the power of banishing, or otherwise cutting off a lawless subject, is to the maintenance of civil society.

But whatever may be thought of the *power* of excommunication, the *forms* of excommunication which were used by the Jews, and borrowed from them in the darker ages of the Christian church, were, surely, not grounded on any warrant of the divine word, either positive or permissive. Take, for example, the following specimen of a Jewish sentence of excommunication, given us by Buxtorf from an ancient Hebrew manuscript. “ *Ex sententia Domini Dominorum, sit in anathemate Ploni, filius Ploni, in utraque domo judicii, superorum scilicet, et inferorum, in anathemate item sanctorum excelsorum, in anathemate Seraphim et Ophannim, in anathemate denique totius ecclesiæ maximarum et minimarum. Sint super ipsum plagæ magnæ et fideles, morbi magni et horribiles. Domus ejus sit habitaculum draconum: caliginosum fiat sydus ejus in nubibus: sit in indignationem, iram, et exca-* “ *descentiam: cadaver ejus objiciatur feris et serpenti-* “ *bus: lætentur super ipso hostes et adversarii: argen-* “ *tum et aurum ipsius dentur aliis: et omnes filii ejus* “ *ad ostium inimicorum ipsius sint expositi: super die* “ *ejus obstupescant posteri. - - - Absorbeatutur sicut Ko-* “ *rah et cœtus ejus: cum terrore et timore egrediatutur* “ *anima ejus: increpatio Domini occidat eum: stran-* “ *guletur ut Achitophel in consilio suo: sicut lepra* “ *Gechasi. sit lepra ipsius: neque ulla sit resurrectio* “ *ruinæ ejus: in sepultura Israëlitis non sit sepultura* “ *ejus: aliena detur uxor ejus, et super eam prostranto*

“se alii in morte ejus. In hoc anathemate sit Ploni, “filius Ploni, et hæc sit hæreditas ipsius, &c. &c. “Amen.” [Buxtorf, Lexic. Chald. sub voce פלני p. 828.]

Of this curse, which they called פלוני, they had a conceit, that it descended into the two hundred and forty-eight members of which they supposed the human body to consist: for the numerical powers of the letters of which the word פלוני is composed, amount exactly to that sum. Fortunately the word חן, mercy, or absolution, is formed precisely of the same letters; and consequently, by the same admirable rule of interpretation, was supposed to have the power of extracting the curse from all the aforesaid two hundred and forty-eight members.

Among the Essenes, the most rigid of all the Jewish sects, who, in the unbending strictness of their ascetic discipline, were not surpassed by the purest and severest of the monastic orders, the consequences of excommunication were very terrible. Τοὺς ἐπ' ἀξιοχρέοις ἀμαρτήμασιν ἀλόντας, says Josephus, ἐκβάλλουσι τοῦ τάγματος· Ὁ δὲ ἐκκριθεὶς οἰκτίστω πολλάκις μόρῳ διαφθείρεται. Τοῖς γὰρ ὄρκοις καὶ τοῖς ἔθεσι ἐνδεδωμένος, οὐδὲ τῆς παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις τροφῆς δύναται μεταλαμβάνειν· ποησάων δὲ καὶ λιμῷ τὸ σῶμα τηκόμενος διαφθείρεται. Διὸ δὲ πολλοὺς ἐλεήσαντες ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἀναπνοαῖς ἀνέλαβον, ἱκανὴν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀμαρτήμασιν αὐτῶν τὴν μετρὶ θάνατον βάσανον ἡγούμενοι. [De Bell. Jud. l. ii. c. 8. sect. 8.]

The following form of Christian excommunication, in its disgusting detail of impious maledictions and tremendous imprecations, is certainly not inferior to the Jewish. “Canonica instituta et sanctorum patrum exempla sequentes, ecclesiarum Dei violatores, videlicet “raptores, deprædatores, et homicidas, N. in nomine “Patris et Filii, et virtute Spiritus Sancti, necnon auctoritate episcopis per Petrum principem apostolorum

“divinitus collata, a sanctæ matris ecclesiæ gremio se-
 “gregamus, ac perpetuæ maledictionis anathemate con-
 “demnamus. Sintque maledicti in civitate, maledicti
 “in agro, maledictum horreum eorum, et maledictæ re-
 “liquiæ eorum; maledictus fructus ventris eorum, et
 “fructus terræ illorum. Maledicti sint ingredientes, et
 “maledicti sint egredientes. Sintque in domo male-
 “dicti, in agro profugi. Veniantque super eos omnes
 “illæ maledictiones quas Dominus per Moysen in popu-
 “lum divinæ legis prævaricatorem se esse missurum in-
 “tentavit. Sintque Anathema-Maran-atha, id est, pe-
 “reant in secundo adventu Domini. Nullus eis Chris-
 “tianus Ave dicat. Nullus presbyter cum eis missam
 “celebrare præsumat vel sanctam communionem dare:
 “Sepultura asini sepeliantur, et sint in sterquilinum
 “super faciem terræ. Et sicut hæ lucernæ de manibus
 “nostris projectæ hodie extinguuntur, sic eorum lucerna
 “in æternum extinguatur, nisi forte resipuerint, et ec-
 “clesiæ Dei, quam læserunt, per emendationem et con-
 “dignam poenitentiam satisfecerint.”

This excommunication, which is, as Selden truly says
 of it, “diris, seu maledictionibus et carminibus horren-
 “dis *plenissima*,” is cited by him, on the authority of
 Burchard and Ivo, “ex concilio *aliquo* Turonensi.” It
 was, perhaps, the third council of Tours, held A. D. 813.
 Sentence of excommunication in this form was solemnly
 published with the sound of bells, and was recited at the
 high altar, immediately after the gospel, by the bishop,
 surrounded by twelve presbyters, each of whom held in
 his hand a burning torch, which, at the conclusion of
 the anathema, they dashed on the ground, and trampled
 under foot: hence they who were excommunicated in
 this form were said to be cursed “with bell, book, and
 “candle.”

After these specimens, no one can wish to see the an-
 cient *forms* of excommunication revived: and much as

the decay of ecclesiastical discipline has been regretted by many wise and pious men, it may well be doubted, whether, in the vast majority of instances, the offences, which might formerly have subjected men to spiritual censures, are not better left, in Christian countries, to the exclusive cognizance of the civil magistrate.

(9) Page 13, l. 6. "*Embraces almost the entire circle of Hebrew theology and jurisprudence.*"] "Mysterium fundamentale ligandi et solvendi, quod quidem theologiae apud Ebræos et jurisprudentiæ velut encyclopædia est." [Selden De Syned. l. ii. c. 2.]

(10) Page 13, line 25. "*To decide controversies of faith.*"] The power, which is claimed for the church in our XXth Article, of decreeing rites and ceremonies, and of deciding controversies of faith, does so unquestionably belong to it, and is so necessary to its existence, that it is assumed not only by every national establishment, but by every separate and schismatical community of Christians. For the due performance of public worship requires that certain regulations should be established to insure the decent observance of it; and even those societies of Christians, as the Quakers, who utterly reject the rites and ceremonies of public ministration, which, in the celebration of divine worship, are used by other Christians, are still obliged, for the mere prevention of confusion, to follow certain rules, and are constrained to act by some prescribed order even in their very rejection of accustomed ceremonies. With the exception, then, of these singular religionists, (if they constitute an exception,) it is acknowledged by all, that the authority to decree rites and ceremonies is vested in every Christian community. For whatever difference of opinion there may be concerning the comparative fitness of the respective rites which are used by different churches; and how much soever the adherents of different sects may contend that those which are among

themselves established are more conducive to edification than any other forms; it is now universally acknowledged, that every church has power to regulate the economy of its religious ceremonies, provided nothing be enjoined therein which the word of God has expressly forbidden; and that every individual member of every independent church, so long as he continues in its communion, is obliged, even for conscience sake, to conform to those laws which have been established by public authority: for things in their own nature indifferent—and it is only with such that ecclesiastical regulations are conversant; since what the word of God has plainly commanded, that all men are bound to do, whether the church enjoin it or not; and what the word of God has plainly forbidden, that no appointment of the church can ever make lawful—but things in their own nature indifferent being once enjoined by lawful authority, thenceforth lose their former quality, and become positive duties.

But though the power of every church to decree rites and ceremonies be, in fact, admitted by all, many needless scruples have been raised concerning that authority which our church assumes, not for herself alone, but for the entire catholic church, to decide controversies of faith. These scruples are occasioned by an astonishing misapprehension, or rather a downright perversion of the terms in which this claim is proposed. For it seems to be assumed, that the power of *deciding controversies of faith* is equivalent to the power of *making new articles of faith*; and, consequently, is nothing less than an impious invasion of the divine prerogative, and an intolerable usurpation of the rights of private judgment: whereas, in truth, it merely implies a power of judging between conflicting opinions, and publicly deciding which is most conformable to the written word of God. This authority is of necessity exercised, and has been

exercised from the very earliest ages, by every church, in the promulgation of those creeds, confessions of faith, articles of religion, and summaries of Christian doctrine, which from time to time have been put forth not only as necessary for the instruction of all Christians, but as preservatives against the innumerable heresies and errors by which the verity of the gospel has been corrupted and depraved.

The truth is, creeds and summaries of doctrine are of greater antiquity even than the scriptures of the New Testament. The church of Christ was established in every quarter of the Roman empire long before a complete collection of the apostolical writings was formed; and the faith of all these nations was, consequently, grounded at the first, not on the written, but on the unwritten word of God. "Quid autem si neque apostoli
 "quidem scripturas reliquissent nobis, nonne oportebat
 "ordinem sequi traditionis, quam tradiderunt iis quibus
 "committebant ecclesias? Cui ordinationi assentiunt
 "multæ gentes barbarorum, eorum qui in Christum credunt, sine caractere vel atramento scriptam habentes
 "per Spiritum in cordibus suis salutem, et veterem traditionem diligenter custodientes, in unum Deum credentes fabricatorem cœli et terræ," &c. &c. Irenæus, lib. iii. c. 4. who there goes through the principal articles of the apostles' creed. To these compendiums of the Christian faith St. Paul makes frequent reference; as 2 Tim. i. 13. "Hold fast *the form of sound words*, which thou hast heard of me:" and Rom. vi. 17. "Ye have obeyed from the heart *that form of doctrine* which was delivered you." And because the apostles every where *delivered* [παρίδοσαν] such formularies to those to whom they committed the government of their churches, he elsewhere calls them *traditions*, [παράδοσις;] as 1 Cor. xi. 2. "and keep the *ordinances* as I delivered them to you:" καὶ καθὼς παράδοκα ὑμῖν τὰς πα-

παράδοσις κατήχησις. And 2 Thess. ii. 15. and iii. 6. But because doctrines orally delivered would have been liable, in process of time, to fatal changes, unless some immutable standard had been provided, with which they might be compared, and by which they might be rectified; the providence of God so ordered it, that the apostles should commit to writing whatsoever was necessary to be known, or believed, for the salvation of mankind. The unwritten word of God, could it be ascertained with sufficient certainty, would be of equal authority with the written word. But because this is manifestly impossible, in all controversies of faith we make our appeal to the written word, as we should to the apostles themselves, were they now living. The use, however, of these ancient creeds, which are in perfect harmony with holy scripture, as guides to the true interpretation of the written word, our church with gratitude acknowledges, and no sound Christian will dispute. Neither are the liturgy and articles of our church impugned by any, but those whose minds are tainted with heretical pravity; or who have no just reverence either for the concurrent testimony of primitive antiquity, or for that apostolical precept, which enjoins us to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once (and "once for all) delivered to the saints:" *ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι τῇ ἀπαξ παραδοθείσῃ τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστει.* Jud. 3.

In common with all the reformed churches, acknowledging the written word of God as the sole rule of faith, we expressly affirm, in this XXth Article, that it is not lawful for the church either to decree any thing that is contrary to God's word; nor, beside the same, to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of salvation. To this sacred rule, and to none but this, we appeal to determine all controversies of faith; and by this alone our church establishes the truth of the creeds which she admits, as well as of her public liturgies and articles.

But though she firmly believes the interpretation of scripture doctrines contained in her liturgy and articles to be true, she does not require a public acknowledgment of its truth from any but from those who are received within the pale of her ministry; exacting only from the lay members of her communion, that they should not openly impeach or disallow it. Had she done less than this, she would not have provided, as she ought, for the maintenance of sound religious doctrine, and for the preservation of her internal peace and unity; had she done more, she would not have exceeded the authority which others, even of the reformed churches, have exercised without reprehension. See Bingham's "French Church's Apology for the Church of England," c. 3, 4.

(11) Page 14, line 14. "*Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.*"] "De animi offensionibus hic agi, et senatu ecclesiastico, (cujus jurisdictionis a politici magistratus functione, in ecclesia præsertim christiana apertissime distinguitur,) vel ex eo constat quod de ligando et solvendo postea commoratur. Hæc autem potestas, et jurisdictio penes eos erant qui ἀρχισυνάγῳι propterea vocantur, Mar. v. 22. et hujus consuetudinis exemplum extat apud Joan. ix. 22. item xii. 42. item xvi. 2. ut apud Judæos idem fuisse videatur pœnæ genus ἀποσυνάγωγος γίνεσθαι, atque apud Christianos *excommunicari*. --- Nam certe tanquam de Judæis hæc dici apparet, saltém ex eo quod addit, '*Sit tibi sicut ethnicus et publicanus.*' --- et certe nisi Christus ad suorum temporum consuetudinem totum hunc sermonem accommodasset, quis eam loquentem intellexisset?" Beza in Matt. xviii. 17.

There is a passage in the book Musar, referred to by Grotius in his note on this place, and cited at length by bishop Stillingfleet from Drusius, which may shew how

exactly our Lord accommodated his discourse on this occasion to the manners of his countrymen. "Qui arguit socium suum, debet hoc primum facere placide, inter se et ipsum solum, verbis mollibus, ita ut non pudefaciat eum. Si resipiscit, bene est: sin, debet eum acriter arguere et pudefacere inter se et ipsum. Si non resipiscit, debet adhibere socios, ipsumque coram illis pudore afficere; si nec hoc modo quicquam proficiat, debet eum pudefacere coram multis, ejusque delictum publicare." This entire passage is almost an exact paraphrase on our Lord's discourse. The phrase "*pudefacere coram multis*," answers to our Saviour's precept, εἰπε τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, tell it to the assembled church, or synagogue. Thus St. Paul, speaking of the sentence of excommunication which had been pronounced on the incestuous Corinthian, calls it ἡ ἐπιτιμία ἡ ὑπὸ τῶν πλειόνων, 2 Cor. ii. 6. and in another place, ἐλεγχος ἐνώπιον πάντων, 1 Tim. v. 20.

(12) Page 16, line 23. "*Personal and peculiar to St. Peter.*" If it were not for the absurd and extravagant claims which the church of Rome has grounded on this passage, it would never have entered into the thoughts of any man to deny, as the generality of reformed commentators have done, that in this promise any thing peculiar was conferred on St. Peter, in contradistinction to the rest of the apostles; as if it were a necessary consequence that the pope would succeed of right to any personal preeminence bestowed on that prince of the apostles. The plain truth is, that St. Peter was the first to acknowledge our Lord as the Christ, the Son of the living God; and as a fit recompense of his more ripened faith, the peculiar honour was conferred on him, that he should be the first to open the kingdom of heaven, both to the Jews and to the Gentiles. This privilege, from the very nature of the thing, was incommunicable. As to that claim to

universal supremacy which is made by the head of the Roman church, as successor to St. Peter in that apostolic seat, nothing more preposterous can be conceived; for it is absolutely certain, that the church of Rome was not founded by St. Peter; and very doubtful whether he ever visited that imperial city. The following passage from the learned and illustrious Mornay's "Traité de l'Eglise," is somewhat long, but directly in point.

"Mais puis qu'il est question de la succession de saint Pierre, ayant veu en quoy elle consiste, voyons maintenant quels tiltres ils produisent, pour estre receus en possession. Ils alleguent pour tout que saint Pierre a esté à Rome, et de là concluent tout d'un saut, le pape est donc chef de l'Eglise. Nous pouvons nier qu'il ait esté à Rome, ce qu'ils ne peuvent prouver par l'Ecriture sainte: dont chacun peut voir, quel est le fondement d'un si pesant edifice. Au contraire nous y trouvons de grandes conjectures qu'il n'y ait point esté, desquelles nous ne sommes point les premiers chercheurs, mais des plus grands personnages en plusieurs siècles devant nous. Entre la mort du Seigneur, et la mort de Neron, il y a trente-sept ans. Par l'écriture sainte il appert, que Pierre a esté en Hierusalem vingt ans apres. [Galat. i. et 2.] De là il vint en Antioche, où Gregoire dit, qu'il fut sept ans, et Eusebe vingt-cinq. Qui croira Eusebe, il ne peut avoir esté martyrizé sous Neron, quoy que luy mesmes en die: car entre la passion de Christ et la mort de Neron, il n'y a que trente-sept ans, et à son conte, il en faudroit au moins quarante-six. Si nous croyons Gregoire, il ne reste que dix ans, pendant lesquels S. Pierre puisse avoir esté à Rome. Or depuis que Pierre et Paul se furent veus en Hierusalem, saint Paul escrit aux Romains une longue Epistre, dont il se fust abstenu, si saint Pierre y eust esté lors. Il saluë aussi une infinité de personnes,

“ sans faire mention de luy. En apres de Rome il a
 “ escrit plusieurs Epistres, en chacune desquelles, on
 “ recontrera quelques endroits, qui requeroient qu’il
 “ fist mention de luy. En quelque lieu il se plaint que
 “ tous l’ont abandonné estant captif pour l’Evangile.
 “ Et la seconde Epistre à Timothée est escrite de l’an-
 “ née mesmes, ou à peu pres, que saint Paul fut deca-
 “ pité par le commandement de Neron. En somme, ou
 “ saint Pierre a esté à Rome devant saint Paul, ou
 “ depuis. Si devant, (comme dit la Legende, que saint
 “ Paul y arriva apres,) et qu’eux deux ensemble eurent
 “ tant de combats contre Simon Magus, d’où vient que
 “ saint Paul ne le saluë point en l’Epistre aux Ro-
 “ mains? d’où vient qu’il n’en fait point mention és au-
 “ tres? mais qui plus est, d’où vient et comment se
 “ peut accorder ce que dit saint Luc és Actes : que les
 “ Juifs disoyent à saint Paul, qu’ils n’avoient rien en-
 “ tendu de luy, et le prioient de leur declarer son opi-
 “ nion de ceste secte, à laquelle chacun contredisoit?
 “ Sera-t-il croyable à aucun que saint Pierre, qui l’avoit
 “ prevenu, qui estoit ministre de la circumcision, n’en
 “ eust rien enseigné? Item, d’où vient que saint Paul,
 “ qui recite bien, quand ils se sont rencontrez ailleurs,
 “ comme en Antioche, ne parle point de ceste rencontre
 “ en la plus fameuse ville du monde? - - - - - Or,
 “ contre toutes ces preuves, ils ne peuvent alleguer de
 “ l’Ecriture qu’un passage dont ils ont honte, à scavoir,
 “ ce qui est en la fin de la premiere Epistre de saint
 “ Pierre, ‘ L’eglise qui est en Babylone vous saluë.’ - - -
 “ Que s’ils m’alleguent, que c’est une opinion receuë et
 “ commune, que saint Pierre a esté à Rome, outre les
 “ diversitez, que nous avons notées cy dessus, je re-
 “ sponds, qu’il n’est pas question d’une opinion. - - - Que
 “ saint Hierosme prestre de Rome explicant ce pas-
 “ sage, ‘ Voicy je vous envoye des prophetes, des sages,
 “ et des scribes,’ &c. [Hieronym. in Matt. lib. iv. 23.]

“allegue pour exemple saint Etienne lapidé, et saint Pierre concipé par les Juifs.” [Traité de l'Eglise, par Philippe de Mornay, Seigneur du Plessis Marly, &c. chap. 8.]

(13) Page 17. line 1. “*At different times.*” The apostles received their ordination to remit and to retain sins on the very day of our Lord’s resurrection, [John xx. 19.] Their commission to baptize the Gentiles, and to preach the gospel to every creature, was not given till the day of his ascension. [Matt. xxviii. 18—20. Mark xvi. 15—20. Luke xxiv. 44—53.]

(14) Page 18. line 21. “*The catholic church.*” “According to the practice of the catholic and apostolic church,” says the very learned bishop Beveridge, “in the ordination of priests, the bishop, when he lays his hand severally upon the head of every one that receives that order, saith, Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of hands: whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained. Where we may observe, that although some other words are inserted to determine and distinguish the office committed to them, yet all the same words are repeated which our Lord himself used at the ordination of his apostles; which the catholic church always judged necessary, not only in imitation of our blessed Saviour, but likewise because that the persons who are ordained priests in his church are to preach the same word, administer the same sacraments, and exercise the same spiritual authority in the censures of the church, as the apostles themselves did.” [Vol. i. Sermon ii. p. 20. fol.]

(15) Page 20. line 7. “*Were charitably revoked.*” In St. Paul’s two Epistles to the Corinthians we have a direct proof of that charitable lenity which, in the primo-

primitive church, accompanied the infliction of ecclesiastical censures. In the first of those Epistles the apostle commands the presbyters at Corinth to cut off from their communion a certain person who had been guilty of an incestuous intercourse with his father's wife. A more aggravated offence could hardly be imagined. But in his very next Epistle, having been assured of the depth of his contrition and the sincerity of his repentance, he exhorts them to receive him again into their communion, and to restore him to their former love, "lest perhaps he should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." Comp. 1 Cor. v. with 2 Cor. ii. 1—8. In less than three centuries afterwards the term of four years constituted the shortest period within which a penitent could ordinarily be restored to the communion of the church; and not then, but through a course of discipline the most painful and humiliating. See Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticæ*, book xviii. chap. 1. &c.

(16) Page 20. line 29. "*Private penitentiaries.*"] A complete history of the first institution of the office of the penitentiary priest, and its final abrogation in the eastern church by Nectarius, who was bishop of Constantinople in the reign of the second Theodosius, is given by Socrates H. E. book v. c. 19.; see also Bingham, book xviii. c. 3. sect. 11, 12. The student in theology, who desires to become fully acquainted with the birth and growth of the doctrine of penance, as it is held by the church of Rome, should consult the chapter on "the priest's power of forgiving sins," in archbishop Usher's "*Answer to the Jesuit's Challenge*;" and, above all, Morinus de *Pœnitentia*, book viii. and the complete collection of ancient penitentials appended to that learned work.

(17) Page 21. line 4. "*The thirteenth century.*"] The

precise era at which the indicative form of absolution was first introduced is fixed by archbishop Usher with his usual accuracy. "In the days of Thomas Aquinas," he tells us, "there arose a learned man among the papists themselves, who found fault with that indicative form of absolution then used by the priest, *I absolve thee from all thy sins*; and would have it delivered by way of deprecation: alleging, that this was not only the opinion of Gulielmus Altisiodorensis, Gulielmus Parisiensis, and Hugo Cardinalis, but also, *that thirty years were scarce passed since all did use this form only*, Absolutionem et remissionem tribuat tibi omnipotens Deus." Answer to the Jesuit's Challenge, p. 89.

At its introduction, this authoritative absolution was applied, it should seem, to those alone who had lain under sentence of excommunication, and were to be readmitted to the holy sacraments: and in this sense, of restoring penitents to the peace of the church, bishop Fell, and Wheatly, and others, understand our absolution of the sick. "Alexander of Hales," says archbishop Usher, "and Bonaventura, in the form of absolution used in their time, observe, that *prayer was premised in the optative, and absolution adjoined afterward in the indicative mood*. Whence they gather, that the priest's *prayer obtaineth grace, his absolution presupposeth it*: that by the former he ascendeth unto God, and procureth pardon for the fault; by the latter he descendeth to the sinner, and reconcileth him to the church. For 'although a man be loosed before God,' (saith the Master of the Sentences,) 'yet he is not held loosed in the face of the church, but by the judgment of the priest.' And this loosing of men by the judgment of the priest, is by the fathers generally accounted nothing else but a restoring of them

“to the peace of the church, and an admitting of them
“to the Lord’s table again.” Answer to the Challenge,
p. 90.

Morinus, in his learned treatise *De Administratione Sacramenti Pœnitentiæ*, has left nothing relating to the subject unexamined. As the work is to be found in very few libraries, the following extracts from the eighth book will, I trust, be not unacceptable to those who may desire fuller information, and may not have access to the original.

“*Formulam, ordinariam absolutionis, sive reconciliationis pœnitentium fuisse deprecatoriam testantur quotquot hactenus legi, aut relata audiavi antiquitatis ecclesiasticæ monumenta, ad annum usque salutis ducentimum supra millesimum. In ritualibus antiquis prope omnibus explicantur ritus visitationis et confessionis infirmorum; et separative eorum qui proximi sunt morti. Sed in utroque ritu omnia quæ ad reconciliationem pertinent, deprecatoria sunt.*” L. viii. c. 8. sect. 1. p. 529. “*Verum post seculum duodecimum legere coepi quosdam doctores docentes indicativum modum deprecatorio subjungendum esse, ut gratia per orationem sacerdotis impetrata, securius postea per hæc verba, Absolve te, &c. pœnitentem declarare posset justificatum.*” Id. sect. 2. p. 529.

In the ninth chapter he brings down his proof, that the indicative form of absolution was not introduced till the thirteenth century, through Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and other doctors who flourished in that era. From a remarkable passage of Augustine, which he gives at length, l. xv. de Trinit. c. 26, he infers, “*Non dum erant Sancto Augustino cognitæ formulæ illæ indicativæ sive absolvendi, sive confirmandi, seu Spiritum Sanctum tradendi.*” Cap. 9. sect. 10. p. 535.

St. Bernard, in a book, *De Modo bene Vivendi*, which he addressed to a holy virgin, introduces her, chap. 27,

as confessing her sins, and himself as granting her absolution thereupon. "Quibus vero verbis? *Soror mihi in Christo dilecta, Deus misereatur tui, et dimittat tibi omnia peccata tua: Deus retribuat tibi indulgentiam tuorum delictorum. Deus indulgeat tibi quiddid peccasti: Deus te levet ab omni peccato.*" Nihil præterea subjungit quod ad peccatorum absolutionem possit pertinere, sed tantum eam exhortatur, ut quod commisit, non iteret. Si tum absolutio indicativa in usu communi fuisset *προσωνομητικῆς*; eam exhibuisset." Id. sect. 20. p. 537.

Again, in sect. 24th, "Absolutionem indicativam raro usitatam fuisse circa annos 1230 et 1240, ex Gulielmo Parisiensi Episcopo videtur evidens. Sic ille scribit c. 19. de sacramento pœnitentiæ, ubi verba faciens de certis casibus in quibus licet confessionem bipertiri, *Dubitandum nullatenus est. quia per utrumque sacerdotem plenam gratiam sanctificationis et absolutionis recipit, nisi per ipsum steterit; neque more judicium forinsecorum pronuntiat confessor, absolvimus te: non condemnamus: sed magis orationem facit super eum, ut Deus absolutionem et remissionem, atque gratiam sanctificationis tribuat. Et nemo dubitat quin possit, et debeat confessor orare Patrem misericordiarum, et etiam remittat peccanti peccata, quæ nec ipse pœnitens in se cognoscit, et eidem confessori recognoscit. Unde in absolutione confitentium non consueverunt dicere sacerdotes, Dimittat tibi Deus peccata, quæ confessus es mihi, sed potius omnia.*" P. 537.

The tenth chapter bears the following title; "Antiqui Rituales libri editi formulas omnes Absolutionis, tam publicas quam privatas, tam de sanis quam de morientibus, nobis exhibent deprecatorias." The eleventh; "Idem faciant rituales libri manuscripti, Sacramentalia et Pœnitentialia, antiquissima et recentiora ad annum 1300," &c. The twelfth chapter com-

mences thus; "Quæ de occidentali ecclesia capitibus
 "præcedentibus dicta sunt, de orientali multo videntur
 "evidentiora. Hactenus enim nulla alia formula usi
 "sunt quam deprecativa, ad reconciliationem pœniten-
 "tibus præstandam, nec ulla alia illis est cognita."

In the twentieth chapter he fully defends the use of
 the precatory form of absolution against the doctores
 scholastici, who impugned it. "Posterius monitum,
 "doctores plerosque qui judicialem sententiam velut
 "unicam absolutioni dandæ formulam idoneam tanto-
 "pere urgent, postquam quæstionem in omnes partes
 "versarunt, eam tandem sic interpretari, ut sententiæ
 "judicialis in ea vix umbra supersit. Disputantes enim
 "quid significant hæc verba, *Absolvo te*, &c. tandem
 "eo, velut ad sacram anchoram confugiunt, ut asserant
 "nihil aliud significare, quam *impendo tibi sacramen-*
 "*tum absolutionis.*" Sect. 3. p. 577. "Cum autem
 "constet annis mille ducentis in ecclesia occidentali
 "absolutionem deprecativo modo dari solitam, in orien-
 "tali vero, in hunc usque diem, non aliter dari, Quis
 "feret rationes proprio ingenio effectas perpetuæ ser-
 "monis consuetudini opponentem?" Sect. 4. "Ideo
 " - - licet minister loqui possit, indicative, imperative,
 "aut deprecative, duo tamen priores modi usurpati - -
 "pravæ interpretationi sunt obnoxii." Sect. 11. p. 580.

(18) Page 21. line 17. "*Absolution the very form
 "and essence of it.*] See Hooker's Ecclesiastical Po-
 lity, book vi. p. 332. "Est autem hoc sacramentum
 "pœnitentiæ lapsis post baptismum ad salutem neces-
 "sarium, ut nondum regeneratis ipse baptismus." Con-
 cil. Trident. Sessio xiv. c. 2. "Docet præterea sancta
 "synodus, sacramenti pœnitentiæ formam, in qua præ-
 "cipue ipsius vis sita est, in illis ministri verbis posi-
 "tam esse, *Ego te absolvo*," &c. Id. c. 3. Vid. Sacro-
 sancta Concilia Labbæi et Cossartii, tom. xiv.

(19) Page 21. line 30. "*The elaborate apologies of Jewell and Hooker.*"] "Ministris a Christo datam esse dicimus ligandi, solvendi, aperiendi, claudendi potestatem. Ac solvendi quidem munus in eo situm esse, ut minister, vel dejectis animis et vere resipiscentibus, per evangelii prædicationem, merita Christi, absolutionemque *offerat*, et certam peccatorum condonationem ac spem salutis æternæ *denunciet*; aut ut eos qui gravi scandalo, et notabili publicoque aliquo delicto fratrum animos offenderint, et sese a communi societate ecclesiæ, et a Christi corpore quodam modo abalienarint, resipiscentes reconciliet, et in fidelium cœtum atque societatem recolligat ac restituat. Ligandi vero illum claudendique potestatem exercere dicimus, quoties vel incredulis et contumacibus regi cœlorum januam occludit, illisque vindictam Dei et sempiternum supplicium *edicit*, vel publice excommunicatos ab ecclesiæ gremio excludit." Juelli Apologia, in the Enchiridion Theologicum, vol. i. p. 124. As for the ministerial sentence of private absolution, it is no more than a declaration of what God hath done: it hath but the force of the prophet Nathan's absolution, 'God hath taken away thy sin.' Ecclesiastical Polity, book vi. p. 362.

(20) Page 22. line 15. "*A full and authoritative form.*"] Many attempts have been made to shew that our reformers did not design this for an authoritative form of absolution; but all the arguments which I have yet met with to prove this point appear to me perfectly unsatisfactory. Minor differences have been pointed out between this formulary and that which is used by the church of Rome; but after all, the words, "I absolve thee," remain to be got over. These words are the very essence of the indicative absolution. "Docet sancta synodus [Tridentina] sacramenti poenitentiae

“formam, in qua præcipue vis ejus situ est, in illis ministris verbis positam esse; Ego te absolvo:” and it is certain that the generality of Christians, at that time, attached no other meaning to these words. “It is a world to see,” say the Rhemish annotators, in their commentary on John xx. 23. “howe the heretikes wrastle with this so plaine a commission of remitting sinnes, referring it to preaching, to denouncing God’s threatens upon sinners, and to we cannot tell what els.” And, at the same time, they affirm, that “to our English protestants this authoritie seemeth so cleere, that in their order of visiting the sicke, their ministers acknowledge and challenge the same, using a formal absolution according to the churches order, after the confession of the partie.” By “a formal absolution according to the churches order,” they meant to assert, that our absolution of the sick is according to the order of the church of Rome. And so it is. Dr. Fulke, accordingly, in his very elaborate counter-annotation, does not venture to deny their assertion, but passes it by in silent acknowledgment; a silence the more remarkable, since, in his strictures on their annotation on v. 21, he states very truly, that the ministerial power to remit and to retain sins is merely declaratory.

I subjoin the form of absolution given in the office for the Visitation of the Sick, in the Manuale secundum usum Sarum. “Dominus noster Jesus Christus pro sua magna pietate te absolvat: et ego auctoritate ejusdem Dei Domini nostri Jesu Christi, et beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli, et auctoritate mihi tradita, absolvo te ab omnibus peccatis iis, de quibus corde contritus et ore mihi confessus es: et ab omnibus aliis peccatis tuis de quibus si tuæ occurrerent memoriæ libenter confiteri velles: et sacramentis ecclesiae te restituo. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spi-

"ritus Sancti. Amen." In this formulary two things deserve to be remarked; 1, that, though it is judicial and authoritative, it is purely conditional, imparting absolution from those sins alone which have been unreservedly confessed and heartily repented of: 2, that though it is here directed to be granted to the private penitent, it was originally designed for those who, after excommunication, were to be restored to the peace of the church, and to the participation of its sacraments; "sacramentis ecclesiæ te restituo." Comp. note (17) p. 51, &c. supra.

(21) Page 23. line 3. "*In this form.*" See the rubric immediately preceding the absolution; where the expression is, "The priest shall absolve him, (if he humbly and heartily desire it,) *after this sort.*" It is possible that some latitude might be here intended, as in the preceding exhortation, where the minister is not tied down to the use of the prescribed form: but it is certain that he is not at liberty to use this form of absolution, unless the penitent himself desire it. The precatory absolution in the Communion Office (which almost always accompanies this office for the Visitation of the Sick) is wholly unexceptionable, and formed upon the best models of primitive antiquity: and it never can be necessary to use both. Observe also how differently the rubric *there* is worded: "Then shall the priest (or the bishop, being present) stand up, and, turning himself to the people, pronounce *this absolution.*" So marked a difference cannot be unintentional.

(22) Page 24. line 18. "*Subsequent revisals.*" At the Hampton-court conference, A. D. 1603, the non-conforming divines made no objection to the use of absolution in the indicative form. But, it seems, they had infused into the king's mind a doubt concerning the

use of *private* confession and absolution in our church. For at the first day's conference, (to which, by the way, they were not admitted,) the king desired satisfaction on this point; and said, that he had heard our absolutions "likened to the pope's pardons." The archbishop of Canterbury referred him to the confession and absolution in the Communion Office, of which the king entirely approved. The bishop of London then pointed out the more particular and personal absolution in the Visitation of the Sick; in defence of which he said, "not only the confessions of Augusta, Boheme, and Saxon retain and allow it, but Mr. Calvin also doth approve both such a *general* and such a *private* (for so he terms it) confession and absolution^a."

^a The following extracts from the Augustan, Saxon, and Bohemian Confessions will shew, not only that those churches approved of private confession, but that they enforced the observance of it with great strictness.

"De confessione peccatorum docent, quod absolutio privata in ecclesiis retinenda sit, quamquam in confessione non sit necessaria delictorum enumeratio." Confessio Augustana, Art. XII.

"De confessione privata facienda pastoribus, affirmamus ritum private absolutionis in ecclesia retinendum esse: et constanter retinemus, propter multas graves causas." Confessio Saxonica, Art. XVI. De Pœnitentia. "Nec admittuntur ulli ad communionem, nisi prius a pastore aut collegis ejus auditi sunt, et absoluti." Id. Art. XV. De Cœna Domini. "Itidem docent, ut pœnitentes sacerdotem accedant, peccataque sua Deo ipsi coram illo confiteantur, tametsi non præcipimus neque exigimus enumerationem peccatorum, consilium autem modumque vitandi peccata, et per claves ecclesiæ absolutionem ab eo petant, ut remissionem peccatorum, per hujusmodi ministerium, sic a Christo institutum consequantur.

"Item, docentur homines, ut absolutionem magni faciant, credantque indubitata fieri, quod per claves promittitur cum vox Christi sit, et mandato ejus expressa Johannis vigesimo: Accipite Spiritum Sanctum, cui remisistis peccata, &c. Sciantque clavium usu ac ministerio, Christique autoritate verborum, sibi omnia peccata condonari." Bohemica Confessio, De Pœnitentia, Art. V. In the Corpus et Syntagma Confessionum, edit. Aureliæ Allobrogorum, A. D. 1612.

The king professed himself so fully satisfied with this explanation, that the subject was no farther agitated; and in consequence, whatever private objections might remain, the only alteration then made in any of our forms of absolution was by introducing the words "re-mission of sins" into the *general* absolution in the morning service. Fuller's Church History, Cent. XVII. b. x.

At the Savoy conference, held sixty years afterwards, the non-conformist divines excepted to the form of absolution in the office for the Visitation of the Sick; and pressed for such declarative and conditional expressions as, "I pronounce thee absolved, if thou dost truly repent and believe." To this it was answered by the church commissioners, "that the form of absolution in the Liturgy was more agreeable to the scriptures than that which these ministers desired. For where the apostles, and their successors, the bishops and priests, are commissioned for this purpose, 'tis declared, 'whose sins ye remit, they are remitted;' and that the condition need not be expressed, being always necessarily understood." Collier's Ecclesiastical History, part ii. b. ix. p. 884.

Now, though all sound and well-instructed Christians understand that faith and repentance are necessary to their pardon and acceptance with God, it is surely of great importance that this necessity should be expressed, especially where an authoritative and plenary form of absolution is employed; and since these conditional expressions are very prominent in that ancient formula from which our absolution of the sick was drawn up, the total omission of them appears the more remarkable.

(23) Page 24. line 24. "*The sense in which our church now interprets it.*" "That we may therefore

“ give unto the priest the things that are the priest’s,
 “ and to God the things that are God’s; and not com-
 “ municate unto any *creature* the power that properly
 “ belongeth to the *Creator*, who *will not give his glory*
 “ *unto another*, Isa. xlviii. 11. we must, in the first
 “ place, lay down this for a sure ground, that to forgive
 “ sins properly, directly, and absolutely, is a privilege
 “ only appertaining unto the Most High.” “ To for-
 “ give sins, therefore, being thus proper to God only
 “ and to his Christ, his ministers must not be held to
 “ have this power communicated unto them, but in an
 “ improper sense; namely, because God forgiveth by
 “ them, and hath appointed them both to apply those
 “ means by which he useth to forgive sins, and to give
 “ notice unto repentant sinners of that forgiveness.”
 Archbishop Usher’s Answer to the Jesuit’s Challenge,
 p. 78. and p. 85. in that division of the work which is
 entitled, *Of the Priest’s Power to forgive Sins*.

The learned Bingham, in the sixth book of his *Ori-
 gines Ecclesiasticæ*, chap. 2, assigns three senses in
 which the indicative form of absolution may be allowed.
 The second of these relates to our absolution of the
 sick; concerning which he says, “ This indicative form,
 “ I absolve thee, may be interpreted to mean no more
 “ than the declaration of God’s will to a penitent sin-
 “ ner, that, upon the best judgment the priest can make
 “ of his repentance, he esteems him absolved before
 “ God, and accordingly pronounces and declares him
 “ absolved.” He then gives, in a note, the following
 passage from Jerome on Matt. xvi. vol. ix. p. 49. “ *Is-
 “ tum locum episcopi et presbyteri non intelligentes,
 “ aliquid sibi de Phariseorum supercilio assumunt, ut
 “ vel damnent innocentes, vel solvere se noxios arbi-
 “ trentur: cum apud Deum, non sententia sacerdotum,
 “ sed reorum vita quærat. Legimus in Levitico de*

“ leprosis, ubi jubentur ut ostendant se sacerdotibus, et
 “ si lepram habuerint, tunc a sacerdote immundi fiant :
 “ non quod sacerdotes leprosos faciant et immundos,
 “ sed quod habeant notitiam leprosi et non leprosi, et
 “ possint discernere qui mundus, quive immundus sit.
 “ Quomodo ergo ibi leprosum sacerdos mundum vel
 “ immundum facit, sic et hic alligat vel solvit episcopus
 “ et presbyter, non eos qui insontes sunt vel noxii [fa-
 “ ciens,] sed pro officio suo, cum peccatorum audierit
 “ varietates, scit qui ligandus sit, quive solvendus.”

In his second letter to the bishop of Winchester he
 remarks on a singular notion of bishop Fell's, who
 “ supposes that in every crime there are two things to
 “ be considered, viz. the offence against God, and the
 “ offence against the church; the former of which is
 “ forgiven by God alone, upon men's prayers and re-
 “ pentance; but the latter by this authoritative form,
 “ I absolve thee.”

“ But this,” continues Bingham, (“ though it may
 “ be true with respect to the crimes that fall under
 “ public discipline,) cannot well be the meaning of the
 “ form as it is used in the Liturgy, in the office of the
 “ Visitation of the Sick, which is the only place, as I
 “ remember, where our church appoints it to be used.
 “ For in private sins there is no offence given to the
 “ church; and yet it is private sins confessed privately
 “ to a minister, for which that rubric orders absolution
 “ to be given in this form, Absolve te. --- Therefore it
 “ is better to resolve it, as St. Jerome and Peter Lom-
 “ bard do, into a declarative form, and explain it by the
 “ example of the legal priests cleansing the leper, and
 “ declaring him to be clean.”

Bishop Tomline, in his Exposition of the XXVth Ar-
 ticle, hesitates not to affirm, that “ the only absolution
 “ which our church authorizes its clergy to pronounce

“ is ministerial, or declaratory of God’s pardon upon
 “ the performance of the conditions which he has been
 “ pleased to require in the gospel; it always supposes
 “ faith and sincere repentance, of which God alone is
 “ judge.”

Another living prelate of our church, whose opinions will always be entitled to respect whilst piety and learning are honoured by mankind, has adopted, on this subject, a course of argument and illustration very similar to that of Bingham. See “ A Preparation for the Holy Order of Priests,” by bishop Huntingford.

(24) Page 25. line 9. “ *The most distinguished for piety.*”] See Nelson’s Life of Bishop Bull. That illustrious prelate desired, on his death-bed, to receive absolution in no other form than that which is used in our Communion Office.

(25) Page 25. line 20. “ *As it has been strangely said.*”] “ I cannot easily believe,” says archbishop Tillotson, “ but that these words of our Saviour, *Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose sins ye retain, they are retained*; were intended to signify “ something more than a mere declaration of the promises and threatenings of the gospel, which any man might make, as well as the apostles and ministers of the church. For that God will forgive the penitent, “ and that he will not pardon the sinner, except he repented, is as true from any man’s mouth as from an apostle’s.” Sermon. 230. vol. xi. pp. 300, 301. This argument is, to say the least of it, wonderfully inconsiderate; for it tends to abrogate not only the entire order of the Christian ministry, but all other distinctions of station and office amongst men. For it is just as true, that any man might preach the word, which is nothing “ more than a mere declaration of the promises “ and threatenings of the gospel,” or administer the

sacraments, or do any other work of the priestly office, "as well as the apostles or ministers of the church." Or that any other man might sit on the bench, and hear causes, and pass sentence, as well as a judge, &c. &c.

The ministerial office of pronouncing absolution to the penitent, though it be merely declaratory, is so far from being trivial and unimportant, that it is one of the most peculiar and distinguished privileges of the sacred office: one, which rightly to exercise requires no small share of charity and prudence; and one which, when rightly exercised, brings with it no ordinary blessing. It is not the same thing, neither does the heart-sick penitent feel it to be the same thing, whether the promise of pardon and remission be announced to him by any man, or by a consecrated minister, who appears before him in the character of Christ's ambassador, pronounces his forgiveness, and offers him withal the blessed emblems of his Redeemer's death, to strengthen and refresh his soul. What says St. Paul? "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? *and how shall they preach, except they be sent?*" Rom. x. 14, 15. "God," says archbishop Usher, "hath added a special beauty to the *feet of them that preach the gospel of peace*; that howsoever others may bring glad tidings of good things to the penitent sinner as truly as they do; yet neither can they do it with the same authority, neither is it to be expected that they should do it with such power, such assurance, and such full satisfaction to the afflicted conscience. The speech of every Christian (we know) should be employed *to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the*

“hearers; and a private brother, in his place, may deliver sound doctrine, reprehend vice, exhort to righteousness very commendably: yet hath the Lord, notwithstanding all this, for the necessary use of his church, appointed public officers to do the same things, and hath given unto them a peculiar power for edification, wherein they may boast above others; and in the due execution whereof God is pleased to make them instruments of ministering a more plentiful measure of grace unto their hearers than may be ordinarily looked for from others! These men are appointed to be of God’s high commission, and therefore they may speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority: they are God’s angels, and ambassadors for Christ; and therefore, in delivering their message, are to be received as an angel of God, yea, as Christ Jesus.” Answer to the Jesuit’s Challenge, p. 99. In every thing appertaining to our office it is the sacred character which belongs to us, as ministers of the word, and the divine commission which we have received from Christ himself, that give to all our ministrations their peculiar force and virtue. With this commission, and by the promised grace of Christ attending it, the meanest of our services may bring with it a blessing to our people: without it the most awful institutions of our religion would be barren and unprofitable.

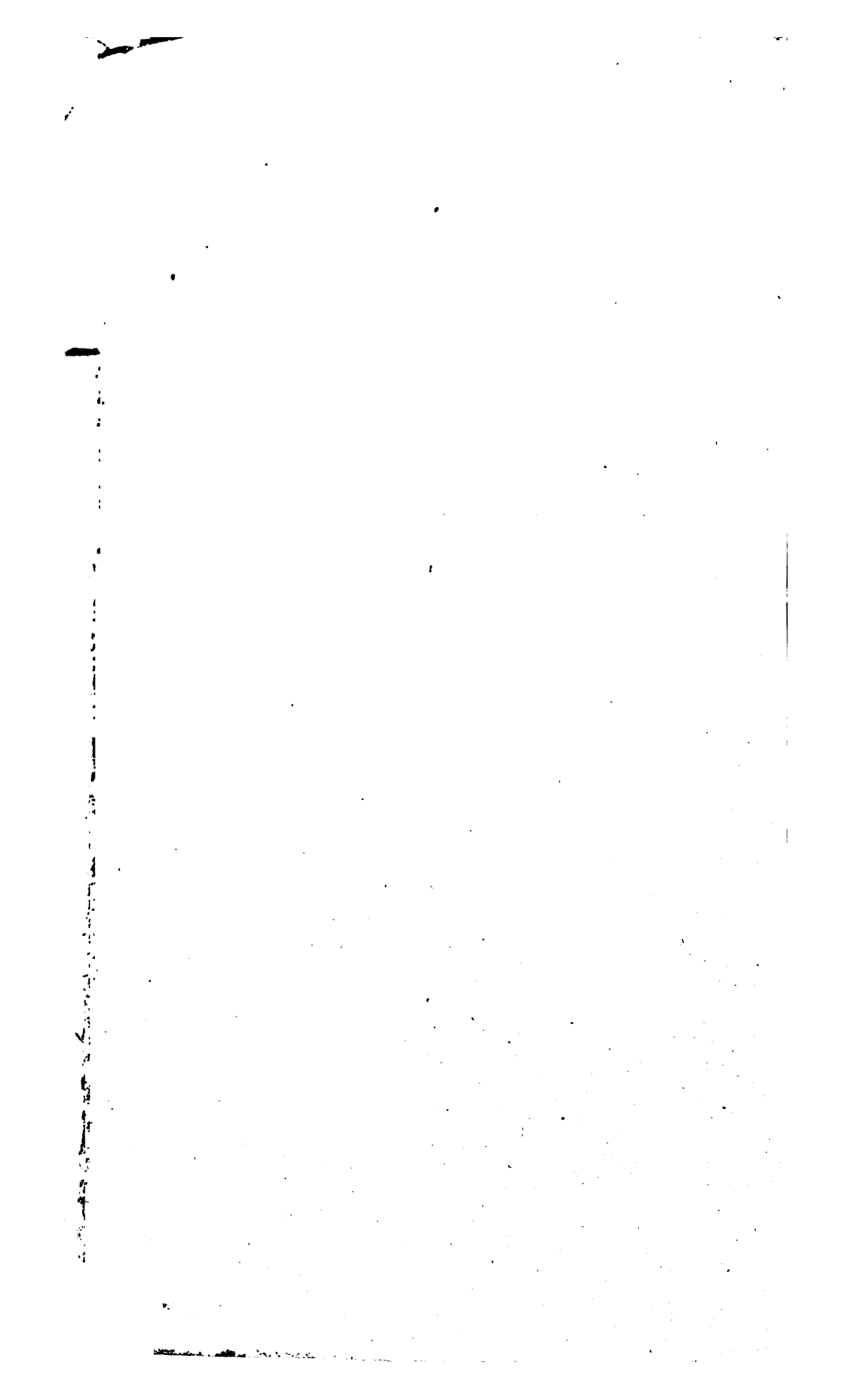
(26) Page 26. line 16. “*Of these natural disquietudes.*”] I trust I have succeeded in proving, that the framers of our Liturgy retained the authoritative form of absolution, in the Visitation of the Sick, out of a charitable condescension to the prejudices which the generality of Christians, at that time, entertained. In addition to the proofs which have already been adduced, the following is not without great weight, viz. that this authoritative form was retained in the first prayer-book of Edward VI.;

in the second it was omitted: but under queen Elizabeth, who felt a just anxiety to conciliate the Roman catholics, and to bring them over to the communion of the Church of England, it was again restored.

With what caution, at the same time, this absolution was meant to be used, is evident from the rubric, which expressly restricts the application of it to those "*who feel their consciences to be troubled with any weighty matter; and humbly and heartily desire it.*"

ERRATUM.

P. 34. l. 7. for שרתה עליה read שבתה עליה.





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